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FANGORIA

VOL 2
#24

THE LONGLEGS EPISODE



LONGLEGS

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MONSTERS • ALIENS • BIZARRE CREATURES

fango

VOL 2 #24

Maxxine's

BACK...
AND
FRONT
SEE
PAGE 38

LONGLEGS:
CRACKING
THE CODE WITH
OSGOOD PERKINS

FEDE ÁLVAREZ'S
ALIEN: ROMULUS

IN A VIOLENT
NATURE

TEXAS
CHAIN SAW
AT 50

PLUS

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LIFE IN HORROR
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ODDITY
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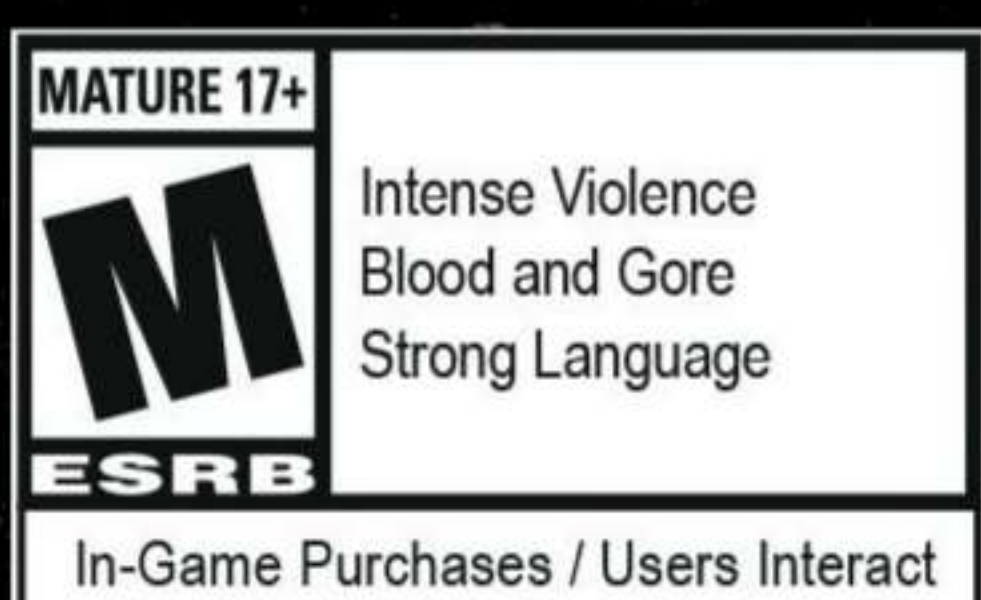
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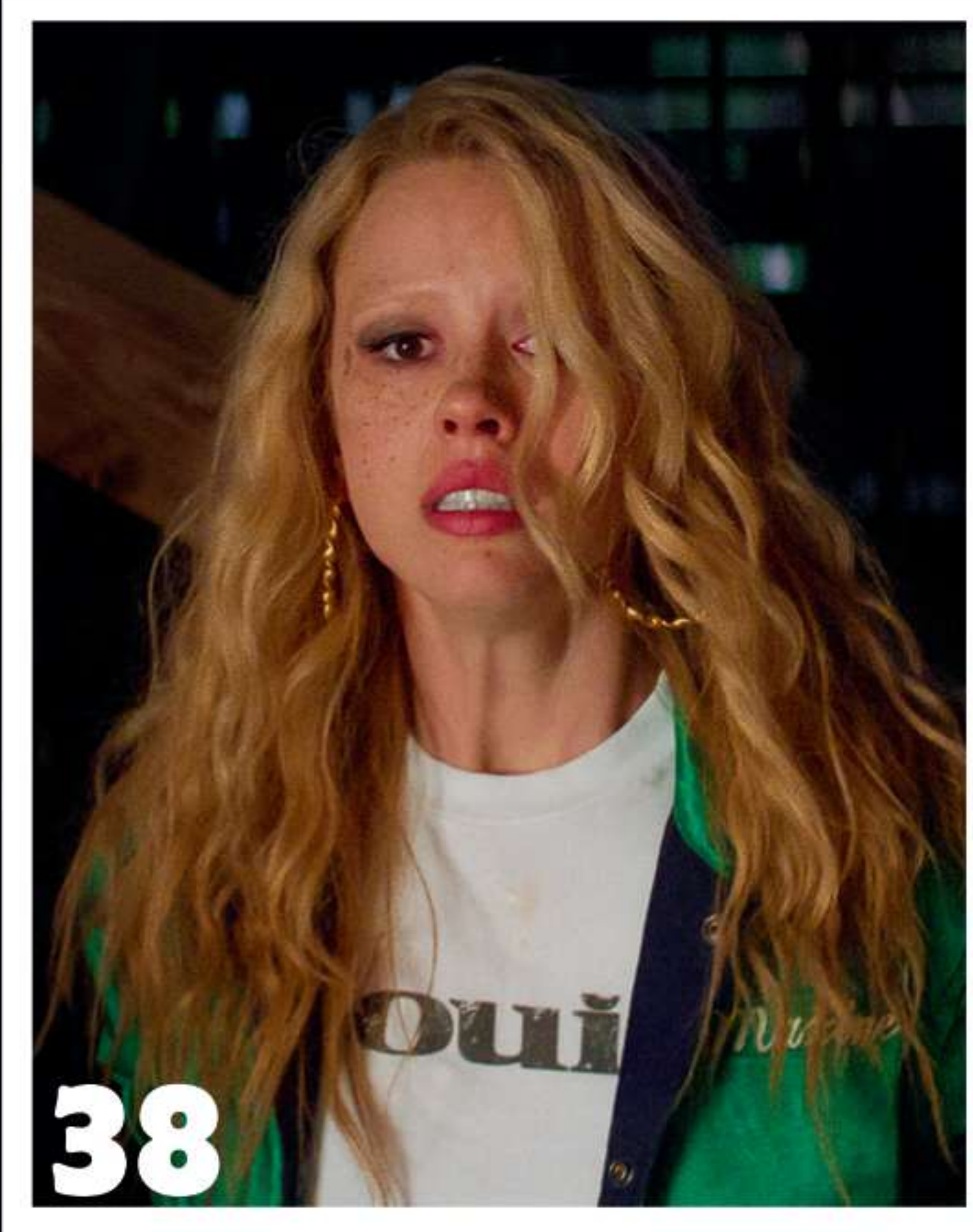
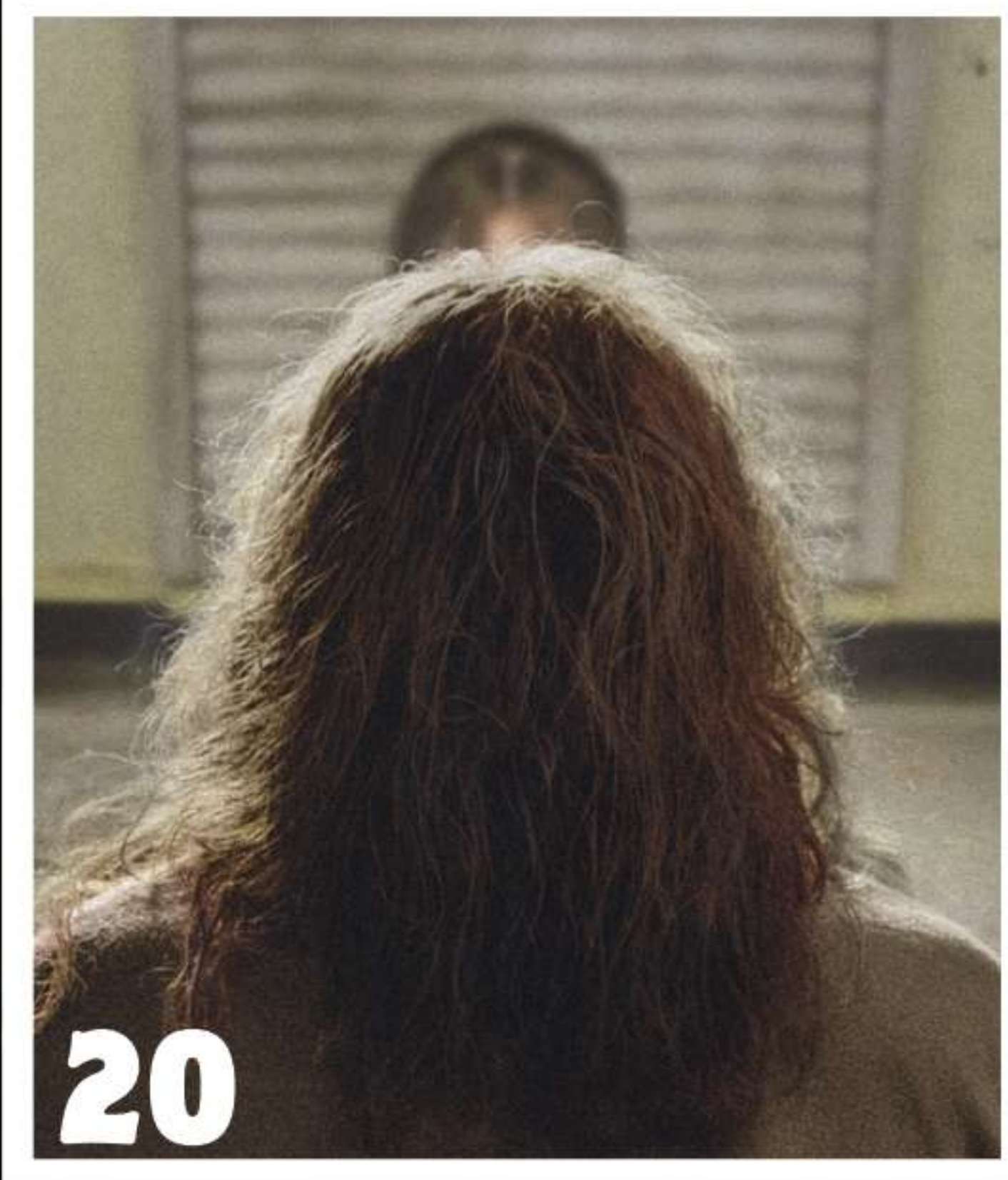
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Scott Wampler and the great Roger Corman.

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INVOCATION

The Center of All Horror

I suppose the thing at the center of all horror is the threat of death. A death that, all things being equal, should not happen. An idea of death that isn't, say, a Charles Bronson movie's idea of death. Though that kind of rousing, cathartic death might come at the end of a horror movie when a villain or monster is dispatched, what makes horror *horror* is the possibility of an unwanted death.

For years horror fans and pop psychologists told us that horror fans are more well-adjusted for just this reason. By watching horror movies, we're actually better than the average person at confronting death. In their own way, horror's detractors made the same point: all this violent depiction of murder and mayhem numbs its viewers to the realities of death.

And yet.

As I type this, I am sitting wide awake at 1am, still in shock over the news that Scott Wampler, Fango contributor, co-host of **The Kingcast**, and one of my best friends, died suddenly today. Scott and I were like brothers, and his death has left our entire community shocked and heartbroken. And though Scott would rightly mock me for using this page for sentimentality of any kind, I couldn't just send this issue to the printer tomorrow with no acknowledgement of his passing.

But in trying to tie the topic of Scott's passing to one that your average Fango reader cares to read about, I keep thinking this: where on earth is all the desensitization toward death I've been promised by a life of watching horror?

Though I never really believed those pundits who said scary movies would numb us to the horrors of the real world, today I kind of wish they had. But I see no evidence of it — not in myself nor online, as scores of fans, filmmakers and other extended members of our Fango family express their sorrow over this loss. It's being felt intensely, right now, by an audience that some think don't feel anything. All I've felt today is abject horror.

And Scott's death certainly fits the description of a *horror* death: it was sudden; it has viscerally upset many people who were emotionally invested in Scott living; *it should not have happened*.

And yet. And yet.

My brain is grasping for a positive about any of this. Maybe in a month, I will embrace the idea that Scott's love of horror, manifested in **The Kingcast** and his work for Fango, brought him into contact with many of his cinematic and literary idols, who then became his friends — a result that was often the case with Scott. Maybe I will eventually be comforted by the fact that his output as a horror fan found such a large and devoted audience. Maybe one day I will get to that place of positivity or pragmatism.

But today, all I feel is the horror.

Phil Nobile Jr., Editor-in-Chief

The Postal Zone

People are always asking us how they can have their writing published in FANGORIA. Here you go!
This is your space to get heard, get loud and get opinionated. Brevity is preferred; having a point of view is required.
Hit us up at **MAIL@FANGORIA.COM**

GETTING INTO SHAPE

As a subscriber and life long FANGORIA fan, I enjoyed reading Stephen Graham Jones' Slasher Nation column entry "Human, All Too Human," mainly because I have often pondered how the Shape could be knocked down by a coat hanger, yet get that tombstone into the bed!!

As a cosplayer of horror I took on that exact issue. I had already made a mobile hedgewall to roll around conventions but wanted to address the tombstone issue. I customized a wheelbarrow after researching the name of the graveyard he would have had to have stolen it from. I then made a little cooler from the tow truck driver he got the coveralls from and added some dog feet (remember, he may have eaten a dog) and set it all up at a convention. I would roll the wheelbarrow around then come back and relax in my vintage chair enjoying a Dr. Pepper and dog feet. Most horror fans got it, some didn't, but I am sure any and all FANGORIA readers knew exactly why I built it. - Charles Ecton

Well, Charles, this is where my reply is supposed to go, but honestly I've got nothing. I'm speechless. - PN



LONGTIME READER, FIRST TIME POSTAL ZONE-ER

I've been with you since issue #1 and still receive your awesome magazine. I am an army veteran and missed out on a lot of issues while I was in certain conflicts. Due to this, it broke up my collection. I am now back to receiving issues thanks to my best friend who gave me a subscription for my birthday.

Thank you very much for being in my life when I was younger with issue #1 (Godzilla cover) and now with the newer issues.

A huge fan,
John P Kearns

John, I don't always run these kinds of letters, but I cannot tell you how much it means to all of us that an original reader like yourself is still enjoying the mag. We thank you for your service, and if we can help you find any of the missing issues in your collection, please get in touch. - PN



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Damn it, I lost my decoder ring. - PN

A man and a woman are shown in a close embrace, their faces pressed together. Both have blood smeared across their faces, particularly around the eyes and mouth. The woman has long brown hair and is wearing a light-colored plaid shirt. The man is wearing a red and black plaid shirt. The background is a dark, textured green.

INVASION

HOLD YOUR TONGUE ON SPEAK NO EVIL

By Phil Nobile Jr.

FANS WHO DISMISS JAMES WATKINS' REMAKE OF THE 2022 ORIGINAL DO SO AT THEIR PERIL.

There are those who would argue that Blumhouse's upcoming *Speak No Evil*, a remake of the Chainsaw Award-winning 2022 film by Christian Tafdrup, should not exist. The reasons range from arguments that it's too early to remake such a recent film, to the sentiment that the original is too bleak a story to revisit, to the fact that Tafdrup got it all right the first time.

But writer-director James Watkins, who previously helmed a TV reboot of the beloved '60s spy classic *The Ipcress File*, is by now immune to such self-doubts.

"There are going to be people that want to hate it," the director acknowledges. "Look, I'd be the same. You see they're remaking it; it's human nature, isn't it? I'll go, 'oh, why are they doing that?'"

Watkins (and FANGORIA, who had an early look at the finished film) feels his version provides an answer.

If you've seen Tafdrup's original film, you know the premise: American expats Louise and Ben Dalton (Mackenzie Davis, Scoot McNairy) and their daughter Agnes (Alix West Lefler) meet English couple Paddy and Ciara (James McAvoy, Aisling Franciosi) and

their mute son Ant (Dan Hough) on holiday, and the two families form an easy rapport. The Americans are invited to visit their new friends' home in the rural English countryside, where Paddy's mask of civility gradually slips to reveal something absolutely horrifying, but the rules of polite society keep Ben and Louise from acting on their instincts and fleeing an increasingly tense scenario until it's too late.

"I was interested in leaning into the horror of everyday social interactions and how, for sixty minutes of the movie, that's just what it is," Watkins says. "It's about the question of how we negotiate these social rules. There was something really fascinating in that notion that you can get trapped in these rules."

But if you've seen the original, the above might well be *all* you know about Watkins' version. Though the premise is identical (until it isn't), Watkins' film plays the story beats in a decidedly different key than the bleak, dread-inducing original.

"I think the film is kind of funny. It's got a dark humor to it. It's meant to have that," he says, citing as influences the work of "Ruben Östlund or Michael Haneke, those filmmakers that have some gnarly humor while being horrific and leaning into the social rules." Watkins also opted to dig deeper into the two women in the film, saying there were "opportunities to lean into these characters, to see how they behave, what their frustrations are, and to explore that in different ways."

Watkins is also quick to underline one big difference between Tafdrup and himself. "Christian hadn't had kids when he made the film; I've got kids. It's the difference between how you behave with children or not. That notion of agency and what you do and when you protect your children." And though taken with the original's premise of being fatally tangled up in social niceties, Watkins imagined

"I was interested in leaning into the horror of everyday social interactions and how, for sixty minutes of the movie, that's just what it is."

- James Watkins

a different spin on the scenario.

"At some point is politeness, rather than being a constraint, also an opportunity? Do those social rules exist in order to help us get out of problems? Do they try and 'polite' their way out? And when are you beyond that? When do society's rules hit caveman rules?"

Aiding him in this new tone is McAvoy, who captivates as Paddy, personifying how a stranger can be a charismatic lure down a dark road.

"Ben sees Paddy almost as this mentor at first," Watkins says, acknowledging that McAvoy's playing in a particularly timely

sandbox. "There are a lot of these bad actors around now. I don't need to name names. There tends to be disenfranchised men who are looking at these people who are promising them the earth, saying, 'I'm a maverick. I'm going to change the system and this and that.' It's fucking lies. Because they're larger than life and people buy into that."

Indeed, McAvoy is completely magnetic, even when committing unspeakable deeds, and his performance alone might justify the remake's existence.

"He's got so much craft, yet so much instinct. There was a constant



PADDY (JAMES MCAVOY) IS BOTH SEDUCTIVE (WITH AISLING FRANCIOSI'S CIARA, FACING PAGE) AND SADISTIC.



ANT (DAN HOUGH) REMINDS AGNES (ALIX WEST) TO, YOU GUESSED IT, *SPEAK NO EVIL*.

conversation with James about tone. Because Paddy is mercurial and seductive and there are all these micro expressions. And you're wondering, 'Is he fucking with us or is he being fun? Is he being playful or is he the devil?'" Watkins' praise for McAvoy is effusive, and is borne out in the finished film. "I've never worked with an actor that is more in the moment. He'll do stuff and surprise you and you'll go, 'Oh! That thing you did. Can you do that again?' He's like, 'What did I do?' He's so in the moment, he's not even aware what he is doing."

Though the film is anchored by four accomplished actors playing the two couples, the narrative hinges on performances by two children – a risky endeavor for a film as dependent on tone as this. "You've got these two kids (Lefler and Hough) who could quite easily let the side down, but don't," Watkins beams. "They *show up*, and they're in the moment." Of particular note is young Hough as the mute Ant, who must convey a complicated array of emotions without speaking.

"Dan had never acted professionally. When we screen tested him, I got the big cameras out and got lots of crew around for his test, because half of it is not the acting, it's the intimidation of

being in that environment." Hough delivers, to Watkins' joy. "Often you see kids that are really well schooled, so they can do a really good read. But you have to break through that and know that, in the moment, they're going to be reactive. Because they're playing tennis with each other, these actors. You need to know the ball's going to come back over the net."

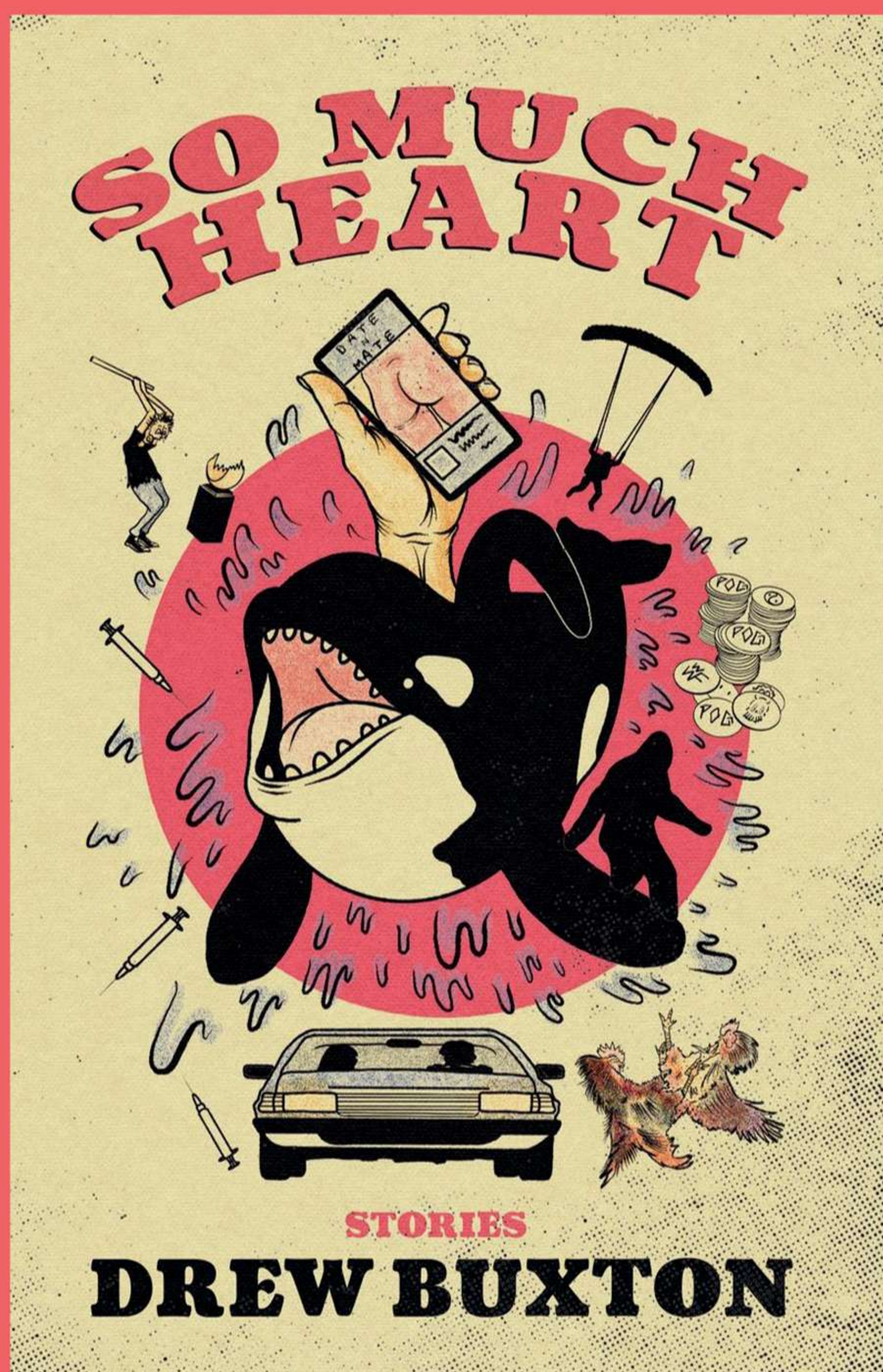
Transplanting the film's events to rural England (specifically the West Country) has another effect on the film, as parallels to Sam Peckinpah's *Straw Dogs* beg to be made. While that 1971 classic was on Watkins' mind, it's not an overly conscious homage.

"*Straw Dogs* was very much in my imagination for the third act in many ways," Watkins says. "That notion of how it digs into the different rules between different groups, between sexuality, between concepts of masculinity, all of that." There were, however, other motivations for the locale choice. "I wouldn't have done it if they'd have said, 'It's a New York couple and they go down to West Virginia.' That would've been rote, and I don't know how to write that movie. But I know how to write this, because I can know the type and I can be specific. In my first conversation

with Blumhouse, I said, 'I want it to have a specificity to a world I know.' There's this cliché of, 'Brits are repressed and Americans are more open.' That can be true, but at the same time there's a particular type of Brit, like Paddy, that is very freewheeling, and there's a type of American that's quite uptight."

Without spoiling the details, Watkins' *Speak No Evil* manages to be so different in tone and execution than its predecessor that cinephiles might well find value in looking at both films together, to parse the ways – both big and small – in which each filmmaker crafts their own distinct, and horrifying, reality. Differences in language, culture and artistic sensibilities make for two very different experiences, which speaks to Watkins' impulse to take on the project in the first place.

"It's an act of flattery, remaking something. You don't make something again unless you think it's worth having a conversation with," offers the filmmaker. "Obviously my film wouldn't exist without that film, but now both films both exist. I think this film drives traffic to Christian's film, and I think it becomes an interesting conversation between the two films." 🧟



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-NYLON

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Tony Timpone's
ELEGIES

FANGO INTERN MADE GOOD

Part One

A CONVERSATION WITH FILM EDITOR FRED RASKIN.

One of the pleasures of being associated with FANGORIA for decades is seeing how many filmmakers the magazine has inspired. Quentin Tarantino read the mag growing up. Eli Roth's dream came true when *Cabin Fever* made the cover, and James Gunn has his cover from *Slither* hanging in his office.

Film editor Fred Raskin has worked with all three of these powerhouse directors. And what makes that even more special is that the admitted horror fanboy served as a Fango intern during his 1994 NYU winter semester. Fred's amazing journey from copy editor to movie editor is bound to inspire future generations of film fanatics.



FRED RASKIN & FRIENDS (IN FACT, A PAIR OF APPARITIONS CREATED BY MAKEUP ARTIST PAL JAMIE KELLMAN).

Having worked with so many awesome people, do you pinch yourself every morning?

Yes, there's a lot of pinching going on. I have been incredibly fortunate. Not in my wildest dreams could I have imagined getting to work with such an impressive roster of filmmakers.

What did you study at NYU?

Film and television. Everyone went to film school to become a director, but I thought it would be smart to focus on a craft to have a solid backup plan. Editing was always my favorite part of the process, the closest to directing because you're still figuring out how to tell a story visually. You're crafting performances. Until that directing gig shows up, this is a fun way to make a living.

Were you a Fango fan when you applied for the internship?

Of course. The first issue I had was the *Hellraiser* cover [#67] in 1987. I was a horror kid, and FANGORIA was a big part of that. I shopped at my local comic book store in King of Prussia, Pennsylvania, and that's

where I discovered Fango. Reading your *Elegy* was always the first thing that I would do when I picked up a new issue. When I went to NYU in September '91, I made friends with Jamie Kellman, who has since gone on to become a

successful makeup effects artist. Reading Fango, I really became an expert in makeup effects. If it wasn't for the cost of the supplies, I probably would've gone into that.

Anyway, Jamie brought me to my first Weekend of Horrors in January '92. It was the coolest thing ever. Every year, we'd go. Then in January '94, I went up to you and asked, 'Are you hiring interns this semester?' You gave me your card, and soon thereafter, I came in for an interview. We talked all things horror. After a half hour, you said, 'We've never done this before, but I'm just gonna offer you the job right on the spot. You really know your horror stuff.' That was a huge thrill, and I jumped at the chance.

Any important life lessons you took away from Fango?

Having enthusiasm for movies in particular, and horror. Having enthusiasm for *anything* that you're working on is a huge boon. When I was working on *Kill Bill*, Quentin and I would bump into each other in the hallway and just start talking about Takashi Miike movies and before we knew it, an hour had gone by

[laughs]. When his editor Sally Menke passed away tragically in 2010, it was clear he was going to have to find someone else. I'm certain that those conversations influenced his decision to at least consider me because it was clear to him that I was a fellow film geek and passionate about movies. That was what he wanted. You guys saw that same passion.

Did you first meet James Gunn when you worked on *Tromeo and Juliet*?

Yes. Throughout production, I met James at dailies screenings. When he moved out to LA five years later, I'd run into him at screenings and parties. When it came time for him to make *Guardians of the Galaxy*, I was coming off of both *Fast Five* and *Django Unchained*. He remembered me and thought that I would be a good fit for the material. He reached out, asked me to read the script and then go to London to cut the movie with him.

All I knew about *Guardians* was that it featured a talking raccoon and a walking tree [laughs]. I was quite convinced that this was going to be an unmitigated disaster, and I actually held off on reading it for a while. I read the *Guardians* script, and it took about 30 pages before I was completely invested in everything. By the end, I had a lump in my throat. I immediately emailed James and said, 'I'm in!' 🐻

This conversation has been edited for length and clarity. Part Two will be continued next issue!



FRED WITH SOME OF THE HATEFUL EIGHTS CREW (INCLUDING QT HIMSELF).

A Bone To Pick

Who watches the watchmen? And who criticizes the critics?

I'm not usually one to criticize other critics in print; it isn't really sporting, and everything in this area is, of course, a matter of personal opinion and taste. But a review of a new genre movie earlier this year touched a couple of nerves with me, and I can cite a bit of precedent; Fango's first longterm editor Bob Martin devoted his issue #8 editorial to Gene Siskel's *Chicago Tribune* putdown of *Friday the 13th*. So here goes...

The review in question addressed *Winnie-the-Pooh: Blood and Honey 2*, and was written by *The A.V. Club*'s Luke Y. Thompson. He opened with a defense of the widely lambasted previous film: "If the original *Winnie The Pooh: Blood And Honey*, as the exact same movie, had been made in Italy during the '70s, it's just the sort of film Quentin Tarantino would be hailing as a lost masterpiece today. Frankly, it's been hilarious watching fellow Gen-X critics, who grew up in the heyday of slasher sequels on VHS, rushing to turn their noses down at this ultra-low-budget gorefest with a gimmick.

With time, all horror becomes respectable and *Scream* Factory deluxe Blu-ray worthy, and we're not talking about *Dracula*, *Frankenstein*, or *The Exorcist*, based on popular novels and acclaimed right out the gate."

There was inevitable pushback in the comments section from readers asserting that the first *Pooh* was indeed poo, a flick whose rep could not be salvaged by the passing of any amount of time. That specific note was one I agreed with – to me, the movie was the worst kind of opportunistic schlock, one that will likely do anything but age well. I would also add that there were horror movies as bad as *Blood and Honey* made in Europe in the '70s, but those aren't the ones we celebrate as classics now; we bestow that praise on the works of maestros like Dario Argento, Mario Bava, et al. (And it might surprise Thompson and probably others that Argento's early works got a number of positive reviews at the time, too.) Certainly, there have been plenty of genre films from past decades that have received reappraisal in the years since, but *Blood and Honey* hardly seems likely to be one of them.

But my reaction to Thompson's piece is not as simple as just that, because, while his specific example seems seriously misguided, there's quite a bit of truth to his overall observation. In the 21st century, you'd be hard-pressed to find an indie horror opus from the 1980s (and, more recently, the '90s) that hasn't been celebrated as an unrecognized gem in some corner of the Internet, and/or spiffed up and given classic-worthy treatment on Blu-ray. That has led to any number of films receiving deserving reassessments and disc showcases, including many that I'm old enough to have seen when they first hit theaters. To name just one example, I felt like one of the only people who appreciated *Night of the Creeps* when it was originally dumped out in limited release, and seeing it stand as a cult classic today truly thrills me.

On the other hand, I have to wonder about some of the titles I've read appreciations of – movies my friends and I groaned over when we saw them in cinemas or watched them on VHS back in the day, and still strike me as indefensible schlock. I won't mention any names, since I don't want to get anyone upset and again, it's all just a matter of opinion and taste... well, OK, I will mention one higher-profile title. To this day, I don't get the modern love for *Friday the 13th: The Final Chapter*. I was bored by it when I first saw it as a teenager, having seen the previous three and hoping for something special, or at least different, for what was supposed to be the series' last hurrah. And catching it at again at a drive-in last year reinforced my feeling that, a couple of grace notes in the first few minutes notwithstanding, the filmmaking is mechanical instead of suspenseful, and I frankly find the ending ridiculous. Give me *Friday the 13th Part VI: Jason Lives*, with its superior style, pacing, and knowing humor any day.

But hey, no bads on those who enjoy it; fandom would be a lot less interesting place if everyone agreed on everything. What does stick in my craw, though, is when '80s-horror nostalgia (sometimes practiced by people who weren't actually around in the '80s) comes coupled with contempt for current genre fare. There's a certain species of thinking that says all new horror is crap, and all good stuff came out decades ago. I have to roll my eyes when attacks on contemporary movies

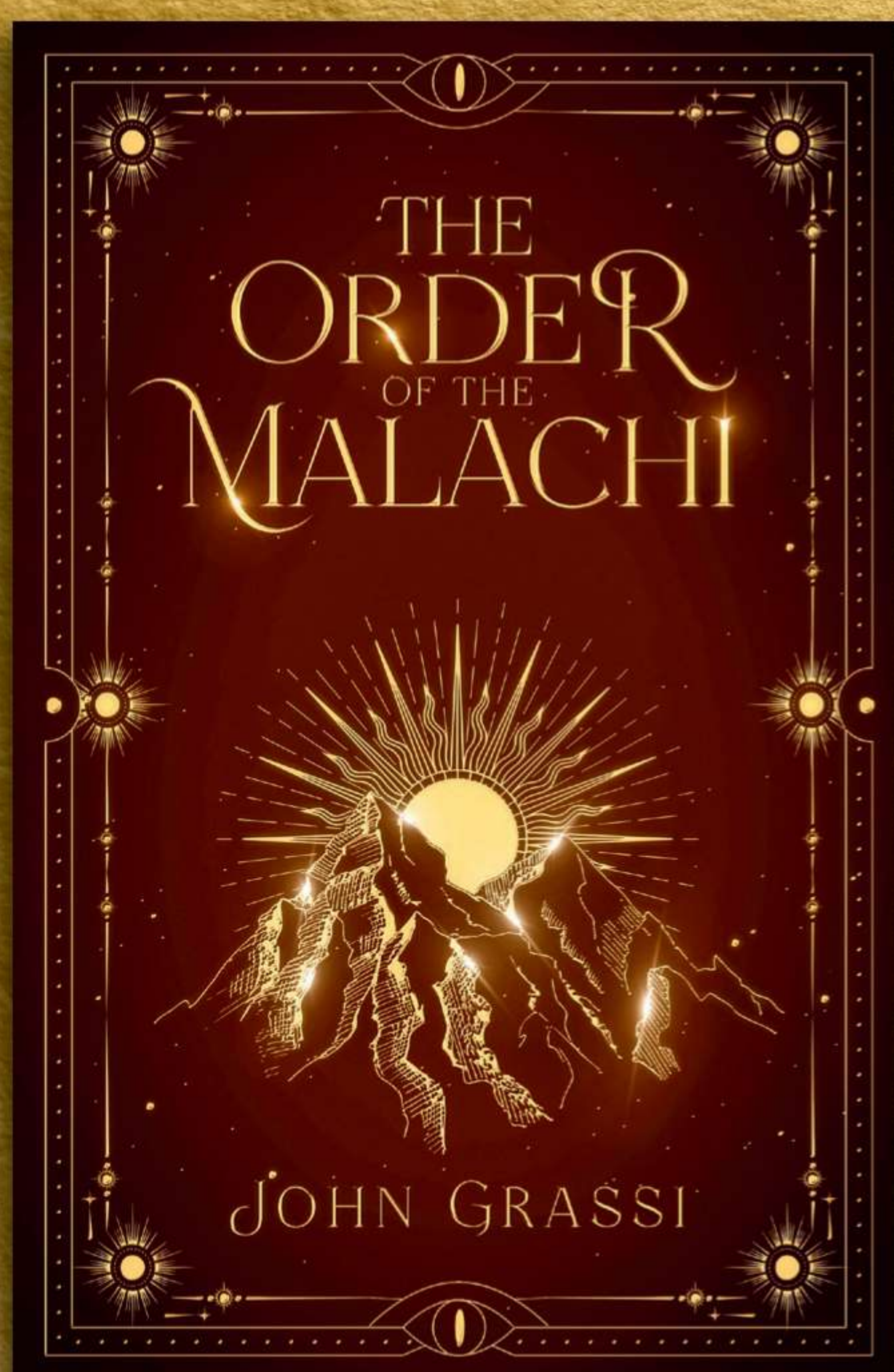


GRIN AND BEAR IT: SCENES FROM THE WINNIE-THE-POOH: BLOOD AND HONEY FRANCHISE.

for being clichéd run side by side with praise for an equally clichéd '80s production because it "delivers everything you expect from a slasher film!"

Having grown up during that wonderful decade, I will nonetheless assert that there was, in fact, a lot of crap that came out in the '80s too. And many of the era's movies that are embraced by horror fandom now were disdained not just by mainstream critics back then, but by genre buffs as well. There's no better evidence than the movie polls FANGORIA ran during that decade, before the Chainsaw Awards began in the '90s. In the very first one, covering June 1979-May 1981, the readers' choices for the 10 Worst List were topped by no less than *The Shining* and *Friday the 13th*, with *The Brood* placing at #8. For the Worst of 1981, *Friday the 13th Part 2* was #1, *Maniac* was #3 and *My Bloody Valentine* tied (with *Fear No Evil*) for #4. For 1982, *Amityville II: The Possession* (now considered by many to be the best of that franchise) topped the Worst list, followed by a tie between *Halloween III: Season of the Witch* and *Swamp Thing*. *Children of the Corn* led off the Worst of 1984 list, Low Budget division, while in 1985, the losers were *A Nightmare on Elm Street 2: Freddy's Revenge* (Big Budget) and *The Stuff* (Low Budget).

So those who want to put down everything coming out in the fright field lately should keep in mind: That sequel or found-footage flick or "elevated horror" film you're trashing today might well be someone's nostalgic favorite 20 or 30 years from now. 🦋



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EARNEST PLAY

OUR CORRESPONDENT EXAMINES WHAT
IGNITES HER CREATIVE PASSION AND REVEALS
THE NEXT STEP IN HER FILMMAKING JOURNEY!

BY BARBARA CRAMPTON

(THIS PAGE AND FACING)
MESSY WORK: THE
AUTHOR ON THE SET
OF *THE POSSESSION AT
GLADSTONE MANOR*.

I'm a creative and I just want – no, need – to keep making things.

The world isn't set up to service artists, unfortunately, so most people I know have other sources of income. To be an artist, one simply has to make something from the heart, mind and soul, and hopefully others will appreciate what you do so you can keep doing it – and maybe make a little money off it, if you're lucky.

I guess I'm at the point now where everything is gravy. I've been very fortunate in my career to dabble in film and TV, in horror and thrillers, comedy and drama. I've acted and produced and been a helper to others. I've made enough money to survive and keep going. I've been doing this, on and off, for forty years. What is there left to do? I ask myself this question a lot lately. I've attached myself to projects both as an actor and producer, and these days I only want to make things that I'm really passionate about.

Take, for example, *The Last Stop in Yuma County*. It's one of the best films made by a first-time feature director that I've ever seen, and I am so fortunate to be among its cast of performers. I loved everyone who worked on this film. I adored my character, Virginia. My passion for *The Last Stop in Yuma County* made it easy to want to help in whatever way I could. The filmmakers, led by writer/director Francis Galluppi, were so beautifully gifted and committed. What a joy it was to be a part of this film, and then to be able to watch it when it all came together. And, interestingly, that's a project that came to me out of the blue. I wasn't expecting it, yet I threw myself into my performance.

I also acted recently in an upcoming movie made by my friends Krsy Fox and Spider One, *Little Bites*. Spider One wrote and directed this creature feature, and Krsy Fox produced, edited and stars in it. I play a character named Sonya, and again, this is a project that leapt at me from out of the blue, and I committed myself without hesitation. Every step of the process was a delight.

These two recent acting jobs started me thinking about how one approaches being creative. There are of course many layers to this process, but since my return to acting and now producing, I've come to believe that there is a crucial element beyond having a great script, great actors, a solid crew and talented director. All of that is important, of course, but I also believe any creative endeavor requires a sense of what I'll call "earnest play." With all the trappings and conditions of making a good film, genre or otherwise, I think we have to approach our art with glee and abandon.

And we don't often know how to do that. Our inner critic of self can get in the way, and others' opinions can color what actions we take for ourselves, especially in such a collaborative business. So how does one stay true to a

creative impulse when so many others in the making of a movie have their own input, too?

I feel mostly as an actor I'm here to serve the director's vision, and I really try to do that. But I also think I'm at a phase where I may go a little rogue. I may dub this my Nicolas Cage phase, whereby I try to satisfy my instincts and impulses a bit more. I am forever a team player and aim to be a generous scene partner, and yet I'm also really veering into character parts more than ever before. I'm getting quirkier parts now, and in my older years I'm more particular and surer of my own feelings in real life, so maybe I can afford to be more eccentric in my work. I can have fun and gleefully be in the moment and let my earnest play just fly. Kids do that; they engage in earnest play. They do it better than anyone, and I think as we get older, we need to try and return to that mindset.

Could we all be practicing more earnest play in every movie and in every filmmaking department? Maybe. As I grow older and take on more projects as both actor and producer, I'm going to make a concerted effort to try. I will try to be freer and more in the moment, to listen and respond and be bolder and have more fun and to not worry what other people think.

To that end, I've started a new company branching out on my own to do genre films with friends and other passionate artists with earnest play intentions. It's called Final Girl Films, and I'm looking forward to bringing you all earnest entertainment as both a producer and actor for many more years to come, so stay tuned. As of this writing, I'm currently working on *The Possession at Gladstone Manor* portraying a spiritualist nurse who takes the job to fight a great evil. I'll be facing off against Lin Shaye in a battle to the death. One of us will make it out alive. Earnest play indeed! 📀



Stephen Graham Jones'

SLASHER NATION

YOU'VE COME A LONG
WAY, FINAL GIRL

ON THE EVOLUTION OF A HORROR STAPLE.



Sally Hardesty. Jess Bradford. Laurie Strode. Ellen Ripley. Alice Hardy. Nancy Thompson. This first class of final girls, from *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* up through *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, set the pattern for most of the final girls of the Golden Age, which... people's dates differ for that first wave of the slasher, but, roughly, *Black Christmas* up through about 1986 or 1988, say? *Halloween* had things codified by 1978, which is to say "reproducible," but by the late eighties, all the bloody runs through that formula were starting to show signs of fatigue – in the audience and the market, if not the genre – meaning this juggernaut had to stumble, hand off its box office baton to all the Hannibal Lecters who would run rampant over the early nineties, until *Scream* came along and reinvigorated things.



It's productive to compare and contrast these final girls of the Golden Age to the final girls of the Neo-Slashers of the late nineties, to watch the final girl evolve.

So, Sally Hardesty. We know nothing of her background. All we know is that she's in a van with some friends, driving through central Texas. Laurie Strode is just an ordinary high school girl. She might be more vigilant and responsible than her friends, but she's not dragging any particular past into the first installment of *Halloween*. As for Ellen Ripley, she's a space trucker. Like Laurie, she wants to follow the rules, but her past? Presumably she went to space-trucker school at some point, and had space-trucker school adventures? They're not important enough to inform her actions in *Alien*. And Nancy Thompson, by dint of living on Elm Street, is kind of under the umbrella of the trauma "Fred Krueger" holds over the whole neighborhood, and, yes, her parents are directly involved in all that, but... Nancy is pretty much a Laurie, yes?

Jess Bradford and Alice Hardy are maybe a bit different. Jess is, as *Black Christmas* gets going, navigating an unplanned pregnancy, and Alice Hardy is in a relationship with Steve, who's both her boss at Crystal Lake and much older than her, both of which,

at least to our 2024 sensibilities, are pretty obvious warning signs. Still, though? Note that neither Jess nor Alice is bringing some formative experience from the *past* into this cycle of violence. The "issues" they're dealing with are in the present of the story, as they are for Sally and Laurie and Ripley and Nancy.

This, I posit, is a defining characteristic of this first class of final girls: the cycle of violence they're being pulled headfirst into isn't set up as a therapeutic story machine that can "solve" or "answer" what they're already going through – what they're "going through" is some form of monstrosity chasing them and theirs through this long tunnel of night.

But then there's *Scream* in 1996, and that all changes.

Before we get to Sidney Prescott, though, we can't forget the *character* of Heather Langenkamp in *Wes Craven's New Nightmare* a couple of years before. Heather's not necessarily the one who set the pattern for the new breed of final girl, but it does feel like she was the pattern for Sidney herself, just because what Heather brings into this slasher cycle is her own past, of having played Nancy Thompson in the *Elm Street* series. This has left her both dealing with fame/notoriety and sort of nervous about

the line between waking reality and nightmare land – an issue which the story lets her process through, and finally come out the other side of.

So, whereas in the Golden Age, what you come out the other side of is "one bad night" or some variation of that, what Heather comes out the other side of is her own uncertainty, thanks to the tailor-made story she's processed through.

Similarly, *Scream* opens with Sidney Prescott still grieving the murder of both her mother a year ago, and her mother's reputation. This is the past Sidney brings with her into the story. And then? Quite handily through the story, orchestrated by Billy and helped along by Stu, Sidney's pulled into a cycle of violence that, she eventually finds out, began with her mom, which finally lets her process through the grief she's been locked in for the past year. It's quite elegant and self-contained – there's a reason *Scream's* endured nearly thirty years now, and still feels as vital as ever.

Then, after *Scream's* success, of course the box office and video shelf gets stacked up with slashers trying to capitalize in a similar way: *Urban Legend*, *I Know What You Did Last Summer*, *Halloween H20*, *Cherry Falls*. Or, to say it via their final girls: Natalie, Julie, Laurie again, and Jody. What

Natalie turns out to be bringing into *Urban Legend* is a high school prank she still feels guilty for that, very much in keeping with *Scream*, this cycle of violence directly addresses, “forcing” her to confront it, and work through it. And what Laurie Strode brings to *H20*, of course, is her first confrontation with Michael Myers a lifetime ago – Michael who returns, so Laurie’s and his story can finally “end,” letting Laurie walk out into the light at last, a survivor. In *Cherry Falls*, Jody is dealing with the social pressure to have sex with her boyfriend, which is evidently something she’s been having to deal with for well before the movie starts. As the story unfolds, too, it’s all about who’s a virgin and who’s not, very much as if Jody’s internal strife is being projected all around her, so she can run through her own head, into the heart of her issues.

The one final girl of this post-*Scream* set that might initially seem to be an outlier is Julie in *I Know What You Did Last Summer*. But, take note of that year between the movie’s opening and the cycle of violence. Granted, the Julie just graduating high school doesn’t have issues a cycle of violence can help her work through. The Julie of a year later, though, she does. What she’s dealing with is the guilt of having hit that person on the road and hidden the body. So? Very much like *Scream* and *Cherry Falls* and *Urban Legend*, the story then takes that as formative, such that the cycle of violence is specifically shaped to make Julie confront that “issue.”



SIDNEY (NEVE CAMPBELL) TEACHES KATE (MARY MCDONNELL) HOW TO FINAL GIRL IN *SCREAM 4*. (IT DOESN'T TAKE.)

So, while in the Golden Age, the final girl didn’t bring problems to the story that a slasher could “solve,” in that bubble of Neo-Slashers after *Scream*, the final girl was bringing issues that could be dealt with via a cycle of violence.

It’s a natural evolution, isn’t it? It’s the slasher figuring out how to deliver its story in a more organic fashion, where all the pieces and parts contribute, and matter, and it nicely mirrors the final girl’s opposite, the slasher, who’s violently bringing their own tragic backstory into things.

But, as we all know, the center never holds.

Of late, we’ve seen both kinds of final girl, haven’t we? It’s as if the present crop of slashers, itself having a long “past” to drag to the box office, now has the luxury of picking and choosing. Erin in *You’re Next* and Dana in *The Cabin in the Woods* and Jay in *It Follows* all come in more or less like Golden Age final girls, while Tre from *Happy Death Day* is, like Sidney Prescott, still reeling from her mother’s death, until she can *Groundhog Day* her way through to some healing. Similarly, Millie in *Freaky* has evidently been dealing with bullying at school. So what does the slasher deliver to her, to help her work through this? A bully in the form of a slasher – one who, in keeping with the long tradition of bullies, is taking bodily control over her. And, very much like Julie James, Jessica in *Thanksgiving* is, a year after a tragedy, trying to navigate her grief and complicity in that tragedy, at which point figurations of that tragedy rise around her, and chase her through to morning.

The great thing about the slasher right now is that we never know which type we’re getting. For a genre some call formulaic, this is a good storytelling space to occupy because, if the audience can’t guess what’s coming, then the slasher can stand up quietly behind all of us and give us that jumpscare we so need. 🧟



SURVIVING IN THE 2010S: *YOU'RE NEXT*'S ERIN (SHARNI VINSON) AND *THE CABIN IN THE WOODS*' DANA (KRISTEN CONNOLLY).

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SOMETHING UNHOLY

Cracking
the Code of **LONGLEGS**

Digging into the many mysteries of the
year's most disturbing horror film with
its writer/director, Osgood Perkins.

By **NICOLAS CAGE**



—C:OLΩP LLO—

There's perhaps no more highly anticipated film for genre fans this year than Osgood Perkins' *Longlegs*. The new thriller from NEON finds novice FBI agent Lee Harker (Maika Monroe) in pursuit of a horrifying, inscrutable serial killer (Nicolas Cage) known as "Longlegs." There's more, of course, but part of the excitement around the film has been its compellingly oblique marketing strategy. We're honored to host this conversation between Mr. Cage and Mr. Perkins that delves into the thrill of collaboration, whether art can be cursed, and the surprising specters that haunt their new film.

Nicolas Cage: I noticed you have something about the color white. Both in your film *I Am the Pretty Thing Who Lives in the House* and here in *Longlegs*, there's almost a spiritual, compelling power to the color white.

Osgood Perkins: If we believe there's a source out there that's breeding ideas, and there are those of us who are lucky to be able to hear it, then the whole thing about what I do is I say, 'Yeah, that seems right, and I don't know why.' And I don't necessarily even need to know why because it's being signaled to me from the source, and therefore it's true.

I wish I had more of a Faustian, dedicated answer for you, but when white 'happens' – when I see something and it's the right thing – I honor it. Is that adequately flaky for this conversation?

Well, it speaks to the enigmatic feeling I get when I watch your movies, this sense of, 'Am I being cursed?' I'm asking myself that. When I watch your movies, it reminds me of when I read Robert W. Chambers' *The King in Yellow*, which is about a play that if you read it, you will go crazy, or when I'm watching Hideo Nakata's *Ringu*. By watching that movie, is Sadako now going to come out of my television? I think with *Longlegs*, especially, people are going to come away from the movie asking themselves, 'Have I just been cursed?'

Wouldn't it be funny if I was really trying to drive people crazy? I'd be Lex Luthor, right?

You would be some version of Lex Luthor, yes. [laughs] But there's this powerful thread of something

so mysterious in your movies, and especially in *Longlegs*, that is really spooky, man.

In early responses to the movie, people are saying that. There's something within this movie that's in and of itself *unholy*, and it's kind of coming through the pores of the movie; it's coming through the sprockets of the film that we shot.

But the other thing they're saying is, 'I want to see it again right away.' We're almost getting a bit of a junkie reaction to this movie. And it's wild.

You, more so than me, were close to the fire of the Hollywood flame. You were the son [of *Psycho*'s Anthony Perkins]. I was the nephew [of filmmaker Francis Ford Coppola]. And so we both saw the allure and perhaps even the darkness of the Hollywood flame. And I think

THE TERRIFYING AND MYSTERIOUS
 LONGLEGS (NICOLAS CAGE) PLANS
 A MEMORABLE BIRTHDAY FOR SOME
 UNLUCKY YOUNGSTER.



you and I both bore witness to a somewhat Draconian '50s, '60s, '70s psychiatry where your dad was trying to contend with his God-given sensuality because, in those days in particular, homosexuality was considered taboo. It was a brutal, harsh thing he was being put under. And you had to witness that, and whatever pain that may have caused.

And I had to witness my mom [choreographer Joy Vogelsang] who was dealing with shock treatments and chemicals that were not developed. And that was coming out of the '50s and '60s, '70s, which had a real powerful effect on my childhood. The two of us came into *Longlegs* with these sorts of background energies that informed us.

Isn't it remarkable how so much of what we do – and I'm going to go so far as to say almost all of what I do creatively – it's all about me and my relationship to my parents, to my understanding of them, to where their stories collided with my story. It's almost like our parents are sort of the

ultimate poem for ourselves. They're the better-but-worse, smarter-but-stupider, sexier-but-older versions of ourselves.

So we start to dig in and say, 'what's in that rich, metaphorical, poetical soil of our folks?' And it is bracing to talk about it that way, because you and I both have kids, and we're giving them this *thing* that is *us* – to want to connect with, to know, to mine, to discover, to interpret. And it's vast. And for me it's pervasive, especially in the work that I do.



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For me, your dad was in a club of four actors that reinvented film performance in the '50s, the others being Marlon Brando, James Dean, and Montgomery Clift. And those are pretty huge thespian shoes to hail from. You could have very easily gone the path of becoming a movie star in your own right – you were terrific as the director in your friend Jordan Peele's picture, *Nope* – and yet you seem to have really applied yourself to filmmaking. And your dad made a couple really good movies as a director, but I think I can say you've gone beyond your father as a filmmaker.

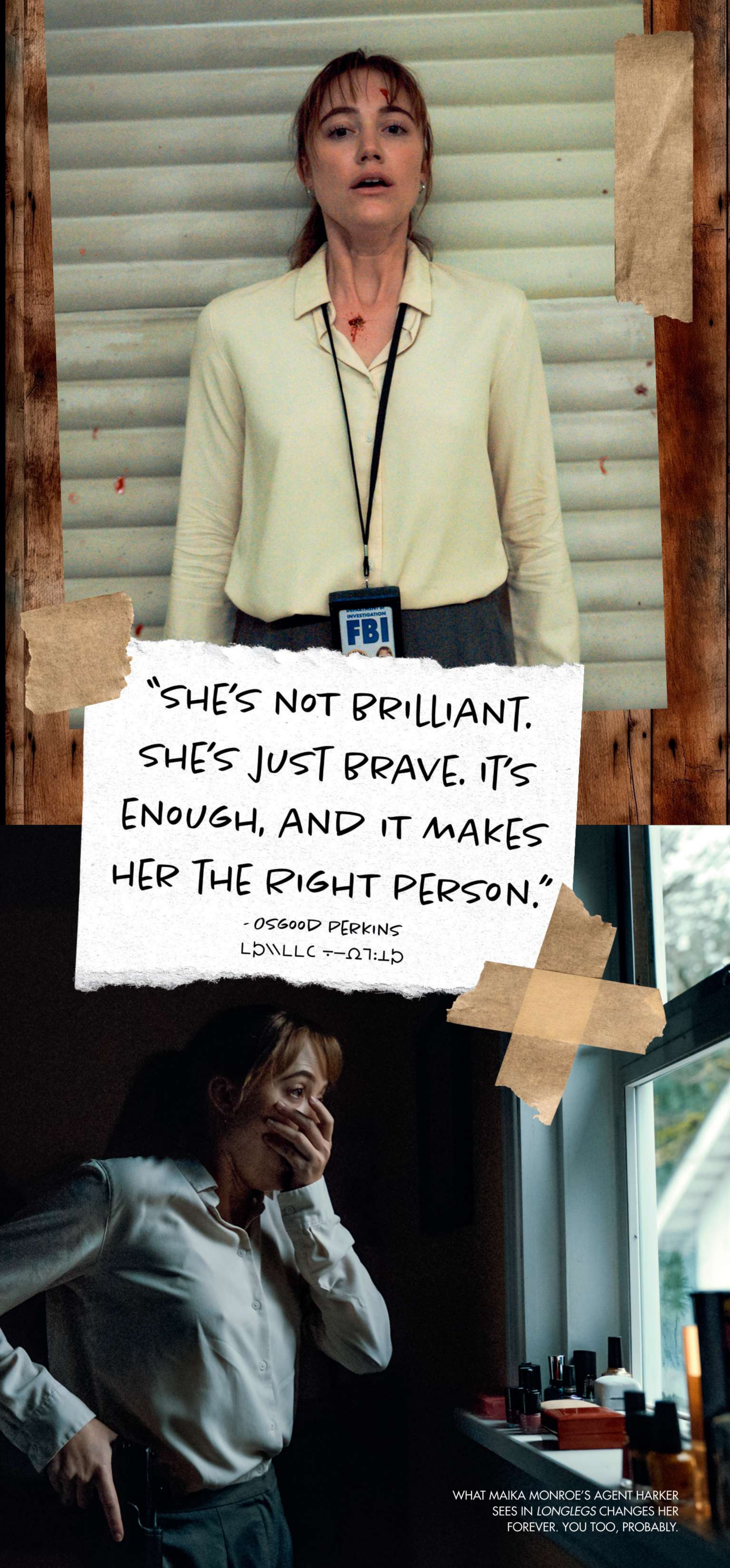
I have this weird thing with my dad because *Psycho* is so perfect, right? You see *Psycho* and it's like looking at a Jackson Pollock or Picasso's *Guernica*. You're like, 'Well, that's just never going to get anything but better and more interesting as it exists.' And as it goes through time, *Psycho* only digs in as being more significant and better and cooler and hotter and weirder and darker and riskier. So that's always been there.

But then as I was coming into myself in my early teen years, I was picking up my first video camera. My friends and I were acting like assholes on the weekends, making monster movies and *Friday the 13th*-esque nonsense. During that same time, my dad was doing *garbage*. And he was doing it because he had children and a family and shit to pay for. And so he had to take what was being offered, and the work he was being offered was trash. And he was being sent to places like Budapest, which – in the late '80s, it was like sending you to the Gulag.

And so my dad was doing these unimpressive movies that, frankly, made my mom cry. I remember going to a screening of one of my dad's movies that he had made in that period, and she cried afterward. She was crying because he was doing that for us. So I think I had this weird love/hate/respect/revulsion thing, in particular, for horror movies.

That resulted in my having this uneasy feeling for horror movies, which maybe is part of what makes my movies themselves uneasy feeling, and what makes people feel the way they feel about them. Because I don't

PHOTOS COURTESY OF NEON



"SHE'S NOT BRILLIANT.
SHE'S JUST BRAVE. IT'S
ENOUGH, AND IT MAKES
HER THE RIGHT PERSON."

- OSGOOD PERKINS
LPM LLLC 7-27:15

WHAT MAIKA MONROE'S AGENT HARKER
SEES IN *LONGLEGS* CHANGES HER
FOREVER. YOU TOO, PROBABLY.

approach horror movies from a fan's perspective; it's a love-hate thing.

The first thing you said to me when we sat down for coffee at the Polo Lounge when we were talking about uniting on this was: 'This is a movie about my mom.' That's not something you expect to hear from a director of a horror film.

I blurted it out. It's a movie about the fact that moms can lie to their children and think that it's a good thing. Sometimes their back is against the wall, and they have to lie to their kids. The mythology of a family, the cover story of a family that is created by the mother in service of the child.

And you said 'Well, it's funny you should say that, because it's actually about my mom,' to which I said, 'Nick, I think we're going to be fine.'

I thought, 'What can I do with Oz's invention of Longlegs that can give him some vulnerability?' What I liked about Lon Chaney's monsters is that they always had a heart, and I always felt bad for them. And for me, that was a way of saying, 'I want to make Longlegs about my mom.' Yes, I turned my mother into a serial killer; you can do that when you're feeling artistic. My dad was my model for Dracula; my mother was my model for Longlegs. Connect those dots, folks! [laughs]

'I'm fine, everybody! Don't worry about me!' [laughs]



It also worked because I wanted Longlegs to be very androgynous. I was thinking about the androgynous prophet in Fellini's *Juliet of the Spirits*, and the prophet was going, 'Do you think I'm beautiful?' You told me to sort of plump my hair. So I did that, and then I started saying to Maika, 'Do you find me beautiful?'

Longlegs had been a figurine in my creative space for a while. There was always this idea that he would drive up to your house on your birthday and get out of his car and start setting up. It's almost like some pervert in a Nabokov novel. That feeling of someone rubbing their hands and shuffling in place. Perverse but scared. This idea

SHADES OF CLARICE: NOVICE AGENT HARKER (MONROE) IS THROWN INTO THE DEEP END — WITH NO HANNIBAL TYPE TO HELP HER.



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WRITER/DIRECTOR OSGOOD PERKINS
CRAFTS A DARK, SURREAL REALITY WITH
CINEMATOGRAPHER ANDRES AROCHI.



"ALMOST ALL OF WHAT I DO
CREATIVELY - IT'S ALL ABOUT ME AND
MY RELATIONSHIP TO MY PARENTS,
TO MY UNDERSTANDING OF THEM,
TO WHERE THEIR STORIES
COLLIDED WITH MY STORY."

- OSGOOD PERKINS
LBNLLC --27:15

that he doesn't feel good doing this. He doesn't feel comfortable. He's like a kids' magician who's nervous he's going to do it badly.

And that kind of villain is so much more fucking fun than the one that's like, 'I got it all together and planned and my plan is going to be perfect.' The opposite of that is, 'I hope they like me.' The 'don't you like me?' thing is more horrible to me than anything. Because that's the little lizard self that's in me. *Don't you like me? You don't like me. I fucked this up. I didn't do right, did I, Dad?*

Maika Monroe is great in the movie.

Her character Lee Harker is uneasy with people and doesn't know how to act, largely because her childhood was lost. She doesn't have a connection to the world, which is what we probably get when we're kids. Our first, 'oh my God, there's a whole world out here and I can touch it, and I can eat it, and I can jump on it and I can pee on it and I can possess it. I can lose it.' She doesn't have a child self, right? And because she has no contact with it, she has no context for how to be. So when she's in the little girl's bedroom, for her it's like being on the fucking moon. And Maika brought so much sweetness and innocence to that section of the movie.

For a character that had her childhood robbed, there is a really childlike charm and grace to the way she looks at things and talks. And I think that just adds to the sadness or pathos to Lee Harker.

She's not a crack FBI agent. She's not brilliant. She's just brave. It's enough, and it makes her the right person. And I love things like that, as opposed to the expert. I love the idea of the novice, and I think that the young novice being faced with the task is always more interesting than the opposite in the same way that the villain who rubs his hands and shuffles in place is more interesting than the one who's got it all down.

These characters you create are so human. We're not trying to inherently scare people. We're telling a story about people or energies, so to speak, in the most real way we can, which I guess is surreal, heightened realism. It's a living nightmare.

And yet, for me, that quality of the human villain is 100% due to Darth Vader putting his hand out to Luke at the end of *The Empire Strikes Back* and saying, 'I am your father.'



LONGLEGS VISITS A
YOUNG GIRL (LAUREN
ACALA) ON HER
ALMOST-BIRTHDAY.





HARKER BLOWS OFF SOME STEAM IN THE CAR AFTER WORK. WHO AMONG US?

Seeing that in 1980 when I was six years old, having the father that I had, a very opaque person, struggling with trying to wield fame and a secret life and a self that was unacceptable... Darth Vader, for the years prior, was the ultimate villain, right? When *Star Wars* was in the consciousness of the world, and there was no *Empire Strikes Back* yet, Vader was everything. It's better than Dracula.

So when that gets reversed at the end of that picture and he says, 'I'm your dad, and I miss you,' right? 'Join me, and together we'll do this.' When Darth Vader peeks out from behind the mask and basically says, 'I love you, son,' I know that my mind exploded, and it never got back together.

When I was doing the photo shoot for *Longlegs*, the photographer kept saying, 'Hey, come on. Make a scarier face.' And I said, 'No, I don't want to make a scarier face. This guy's tortured. This is what you're getting, the face of my mother, okay? She's miserable.'

Basil Gogos was a friend of mine who painted all the classic *Famous*

***Monsters of Filmland* covers, and he told me he painted the monsters like Lon Chaney as the Phantom of the Opera or in *London After Midnight* with tears in their eyes. They were very sad. I wanted to keep that Basil Gogos look in my eyes as Longlegs. We both approached it from a very human level.**

Nick, the thing that is you was hugely – is hugely – important to this film. The sound guy came over to me one day and said, 'Oz, I've been doing this for a long time, and I've never seen anything like it. When Cage is mic'd and goes loud, the needle goes *right* to the mark where any further it would clip, but it doesn't. Ever. His loudest goes right to the line. And then his softest whisper goes right to the other line.' The control that he saw in *your* decibels, dude.

Right. Wow.

As time moves forward and things become weirder with computers and AI, we're maybe on the last legs of seeing somebody who can do what you do. The volume of humanity that you brought to the screen, and the edges to which you were able to go to without

busting them. And certainly for me, growing up with your movies and your face and your energy, and just your fucking passion, man. You're the real deal, and it was an exquisite honor to work with you. You bring so much to everything you do, and you're a gift.

Much appreciated, Oz. I hear what you're saying, though, about what it's all going to look like twenty years from now. Who knows? So your appreciation of the real and the organic means a lot to me.

We were coloring *Longlegs* in LA, and this lady came in to bring us lunch. And I pointed to you on screen and said, 'Who's that?' And we watched three sentences of yours in the interrogation room. She said, 'I don't know, Meryl Streep?' And I was like, 'Yeah. You got it. First try.'

No offense, Meryl, if you're reading this somehow. I don't think Meryl Streep's reading our magazine, but just in case. ☹

This conversation has been edited for length and clarity.



The **LONGLEGS** Scene

Inspired By

FANGORIA

///: Osgood Perkins

HOW A CHILDHOOD MEMORY OF THE MAG SPARKED A PIVOTAL MOMENT IN THE FILM.

When I hear the word FANGORIA, that's an instant callback to my dad. Instantly. Because when I was a kid, people were always sending my dad STUFF. Back in the '70s and '80s, you would get mail that you didn't necessarily expect or ask for, and in our house we'd get mail like, 'Oh, what the fuck is this thing?' One of the most impactful ones was when someone sent my dad an autographed picture of Sharon Tate – which I still have. A really good Sharon Tate signature on a headshot, just out of nowhere. Just a fan saying, "Hey, Perkins, you should have this."

I remember being in Cape Cod and my dad being sent FANGORIA magazine, I assume by the magazine for some reason or other. And I was too young, too innocent to handle a FANGORIA magazine, especially what must've been a 1980 issue, which was

probably pretty raw. And I remember finding it and holding it and thinking, *this contains all kinds of terrors*. And it was my dad's and it belonged to him – it was none of my business – but I wanted to know it.

I remember seeing a picture of Linda Blair as Regan from *The Exorcist*, with the scars on her face. And I cut it out. I'm six or eight years old at the time, and I had a giant toy chest. I took the cut-out picture to the bottom of the toy chest, and I put it face down under all my toys. I don't know exactly why I did that – but is there really any such thing as "exactly" in a moment like this? I must have been wanting or needing to hide what must be hidden, what needed to be hidden. There was a fair amount of truth around my father that I was not allowed to know about, that was important that we all keep hidden. I think I must have been reenacting that to some degree with

the horror that was poor Regan. (Also worth mentioning that she was a child, roughly the same age as I was, when I felt deeply compelled to hide her.)

In *Longlegs*, Lee Harker (Maika Monroe) discovers an essential clue, an essential truth, inside her own toy box in her childhood bedroom. That moment is a direct lift, a crib, from my own childhood experience. She finds the thing that she's repressed. She's unhidden the thing she didn't even know she was protecting. That's how far down it goes for her. As far down as the bottom of a child's toy box.

In the script, the print on the top of her toy box read "my stuff"; in the movie we changed it to "Lee's stuff," but you get the point. It's the kind of stuff one would process with a therapist.

I've certainly told my version of that experience to a therapist (or two or three). So why not put it into a movie for everyone to see? 🧠

THE YOUTH ARE
STARTING TO CHANGE:

FEDE ÁLVAREZ + RIDLEY SCOTT

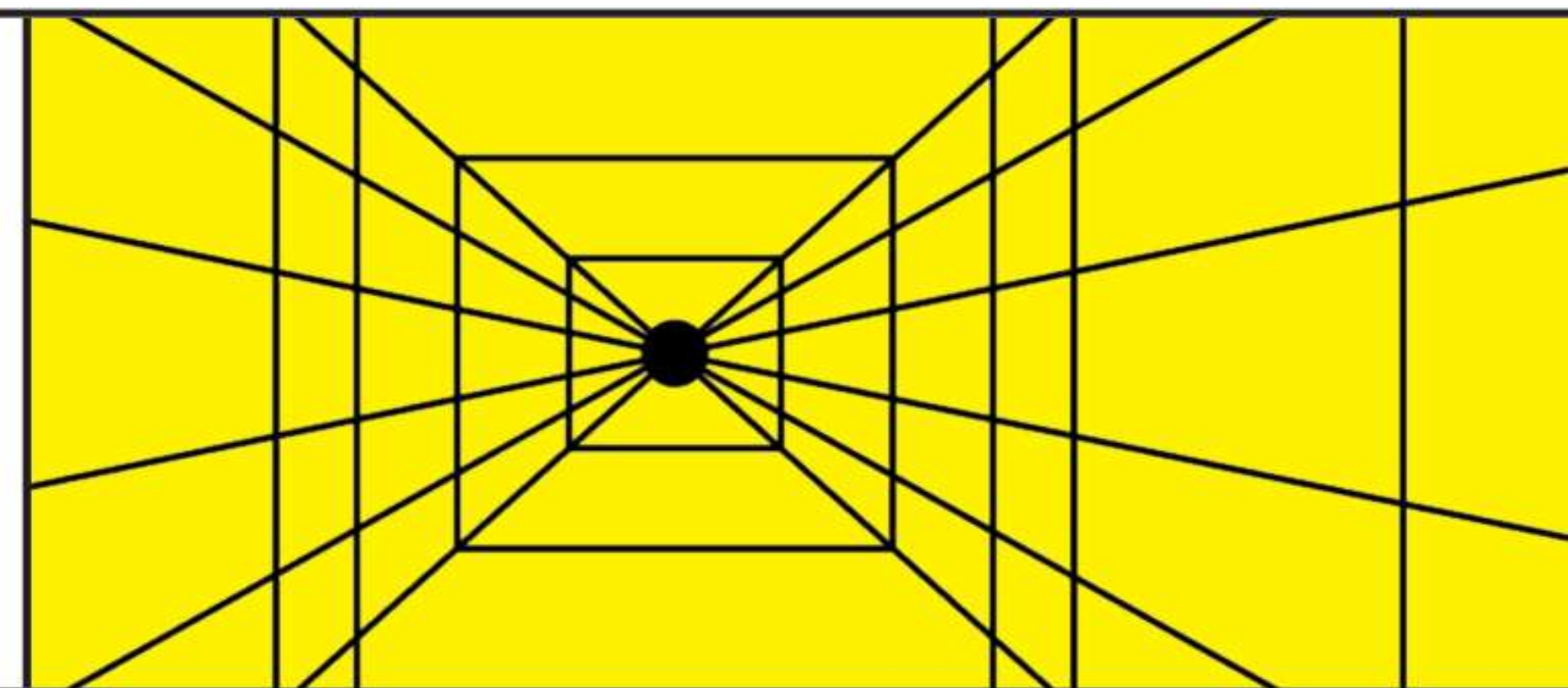
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A L I E N

R O M U L U S

BY RICHARD NEWBY

In the seventh installment of the *ALIEN* franchise, the *DON'T BREATHE* director goes back to the... middle.

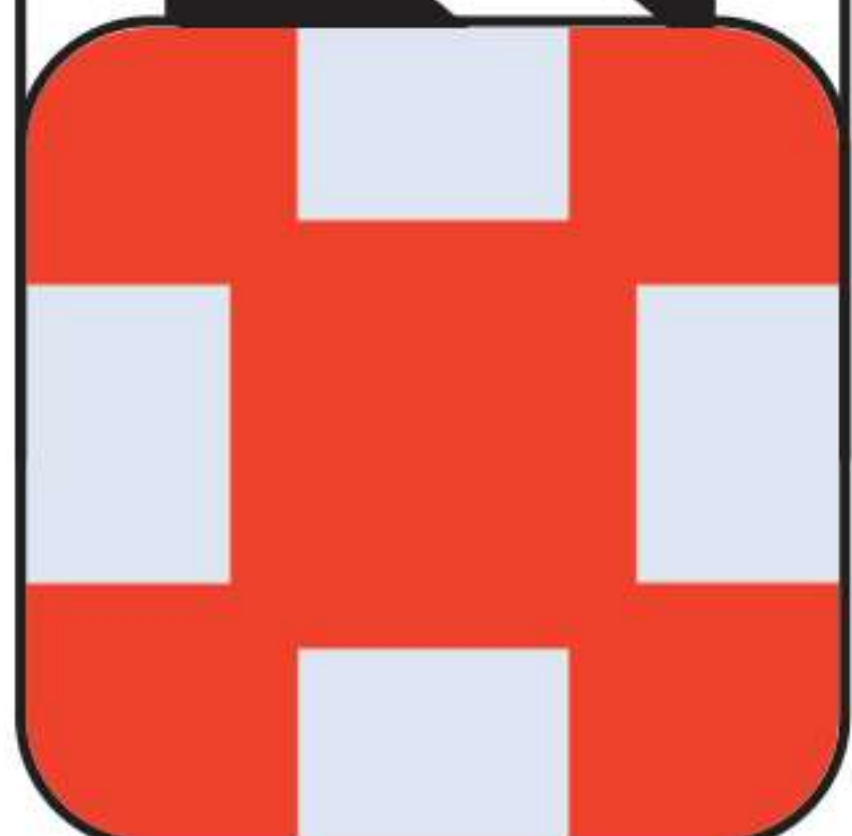


"WHAT THE FUCK IS THAT THING?"

Fede Álvarez grins as he describes his first reaction to the Xenomorph as a child. Remarkably, it wasn't any of the movies that left ten-year-old Álvarez captivated. Rather it was a behind-the-scenes television featurette, depicting scenes from 1979's *Alien*, including the demise of Brett (Harry Dean Stanton) and the first appearance of the full-grown alien. He recalls looking at a "massive black dragon of sorts that was made of chains," and remembers the sheer terror he felt as a child not yet versed in horror, unable to classify what it was he had just seen. Years later, when Álvarez finally saw Ridley Scott's *Alien* in full, the film's refusal to answer what the alien was, and where it came from, left an indelible mark on him.



DIRECTOR FEDE ÁLVAREZ INSPECTS
A FACEHUGGER ON SET.





THIS YEAR'S MODEL: A XENOMORPH GREET'S A CREW MEMBER WITH A SMILE.

Now in post-production on *Alien: Romulus*, the seventh film in the *Alien* franchise (not including those two out-of-continuity excursions with the Predators), Álvarez can't hide his excitement over the chance to play in this universe and leave audiences with new questions and visceral responses. Álvarez is, of course, no stranger to taking the reins of horror installments with historic legacies, having resurrected Sam Raimi's Deadites in his first feature, *Evil Dead* (2013). But it was the success and reaction to his second feature, *Don't Breathe*, that shot him towards the cold darkness of space where he was welcomed with a warm embrace. When asked by a studio exec about what else he wanted to do, Álvarez immediately had an answer: *Alien*. He did not expect to work within the mainline franchise, as Ridley Scott was working on *Alien: Covenant* at the time. He was just hoping to create something within the space of Weyland-Yutani. And simply by chance, Álvarez was granted the opportunity to write a one-page pitch to Ridley Scott. No pressure.

I THINK THE SCARIEST PART OF THE MOVIE HAS TO DO WITH THE MOST HUMAN ASPECT OF THE MONSTER."

- Fede Álvarez

A deleted scene in James Cameron's *Aliens*, featuring a group of kids playing in the corridors of Hadley's Hope, gave Álvarez a new perspective on what *Alien* could be. "Part of me connected with them, having grown up in Uruguay in a very small country, very away from everything where you never think you'll do anything but do what your parents did... if you're lucky. So, there was something about that idea of when you see those kids and then in the next scenes, they talk about the Shake and Bake colonies where you put a bunch of families there and wait fifty years until you have an atmosphere. And I was like, 'Well, those poor kids, they have nothing to do for fifty years. They have no place, no air to breathe really, or to have a true life.' So those were the characters that I focused on. What's

going to happen with those kids?" With *Alien: Romulus*, set between *Alien* and *Aliens*, Fede wants to hand the franchise over to a younger generation, one already burdened by the mentality that the best days of humanity are already behind them. These kids are forced to face, as Álvarez did all those years ago, a lack of answers.

At this point in his illustrious career, you might expect Ridley Scott to have all the answers. He does have quite a lot of them, but he remains curious and ever interested in moving forward as both a director and producer. "An old friend of mine, he actually wrote *Blade Runner*, he said, 'Art's like a shark. You got to keep swimming, otherwise you drown.' Sharks drown, they don't sleep, they keep moving. You know that?" I



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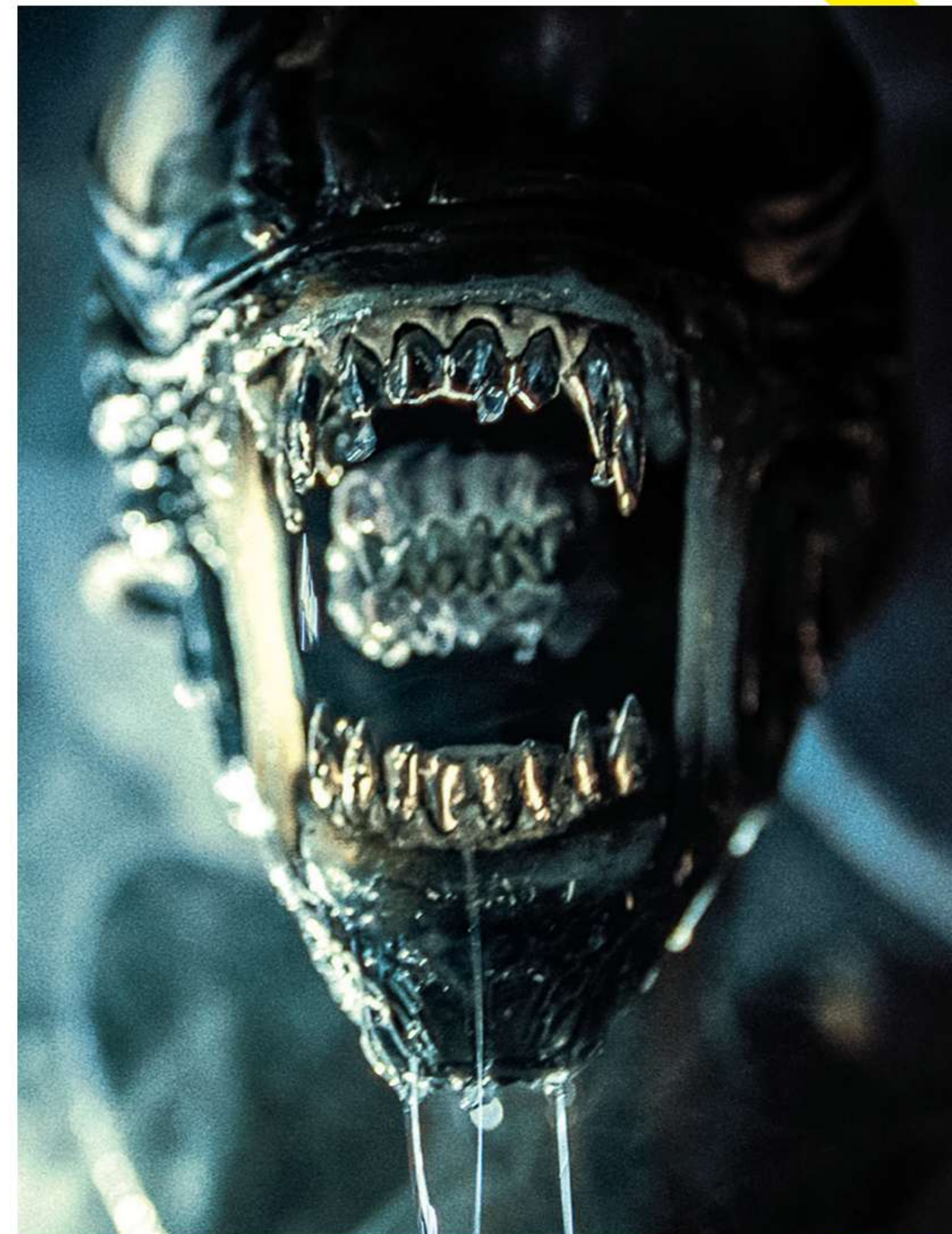
- Eric Barba, VFX Supervisor

A FACEHUGGER
AND A TERRIFIED
CREW MEMBER (SPIKE
FEARN): JUST SOME OF
THE INGREDIENTS THAT
GO INTO XENO CURRY.

admitted that I didn't but I was struck by how this fact applied to both Scott's career of near constant output and the *Alien* franchise. The 86-year-old filmmaker, who shows no sign of treading water, tells me he has three directorial projects in development, having just locked *Gladiator II*. And funny enough, just like Álvarez, he too was looking to hand the *Alien* franchise over to a younger generation. The director has spent the entirety of his career fielding questions about *Alien*, a daunting position for any interviewer. Yet, to my surprise and great pleasure, he expresses nothing but excitement about *Romulus* and working with Álvarez, because this, like all of his endeavors, keeps him moving forward.

So, what is it that appeals to Scott about *Alien: Romulus*? "I think things get worn out, and one is always looking for a fresh approach to something as worthwhile as a good franchise, which *Alien* is. I watched it gradually die, and by the time we got to *Alien 4* [*Resurrection*], I think it was cooked and done, and the beast was no longer unique. And the more familiar you are with the beast, it makes it less entertaining in terms of why you go

to see it, which is to have the shit scared out of you." When *Resurrection* failed to make good on its namesake, Scott began contemplating where the franchise could go from that point, and to push it further, he needed to go back. "We re-reversed it into the *Prometheus* idea, resurrecting the possibility of something fresh. I think *Alien: Covenant* did pretty good, and *Prometheus* was surprising, and the reaction was enormous to the fact that there was still life in the beast." Notably, Scott never refers to the alien as a Xenomorph. It's always "the beast," a mysterious, suggestively religious term attributed to a creation which he maintains that, without the brilliance of artist H.R. Giger, would not have spawned a franchise. Scott tells me he felt he had committed to his duty of bringing back the beast, and despite discussions of a follow-up to *Covenant*, it was Álvarez's one-page pitch that grabbed him. What makes *Alien: Romulus* the key to the franchise's evolution? "It's really about Fedé," Scott says. But of course, I couldn't help but ask if he'd ever finish David's (Michael Fassbender) story after *Covenant*. After all, there are



always more avenues to explore in this universe. "Never say never," he replied.

Setting a new *Alien* film between the two most beloved entries of the franchise isn't something one does without the confidence of knowing they've got something special on their hands, something that will always

be compared to the two films it's sandwiched between. When asked about his choice of setting, Álvarez says he wanted to bring the franchise back to its horror roots, and for him, the most terrifying entries were always *Alien* and *Aliens*. "How can I create a universe that has the DNA of the first one and the second one? And that's when we thought, for the story we want to make and tell, it made complete sense that it was a few years after the first one. The opening scene of the movie, when you see it, you'll see that in a way the only way to make sense of that scene is that it's happened many years after the events of the first film." Álvarez confirms that every *Alien* film impacted his choices for the film in some way, but those weren't his only influences. Something horror fans will surely appreciate is Álvarez's love for comics and video games, and those were ever-present on his mind as he entered production. "I collect most of the old [comics]. There's new ones still coming out, all the Marvel ones, that are pretty awesome. So that was really helpful and inspiring when it came to going beyond what's in the movies and finding out there's certain chapters here and there, certain ideas where I go, 'Oh, that's actually really cool.' And that's why really for me as a director, as a writer, you stand on the shoulders of all these artists that dealt with this before and have had their time to come up with new ideas and new angles for this story. Even in the games as well. A lot of people will notice that there's a lot of [the 2014 video game] *Alien: Isolation* in the film. It was a big influence on me as well. When I was having those early conversations with Ridley, I had the chance to tell him what I wanted. I was actually starting to play *Alien: Isolation* and the game made me remember how scary *Alien* can be."

And of course, some of the best scares in the *Alien* franchise stem from their practical and visual effects. As well as grounding the film in a period most audiences will be familiar with, Álvarez also wanted to keep the technology, special effects, and creatures within that realm. While there's been plenty of excitement about the use of practical effects in the film, the lifeblood of many a horror

fan, *Alien: Romulus* is really a united effort between practical and visual effects teams, which shouldn't come as a surprise given Álvarez's history of creating VFX models and his love of copious amounts of practical blood. Both *Alien* and *Aliens* are known for their groundbreaking special effects, which allowed VFX Supervisor Eric Barba and Special Effects Supervisor Gábor Kiszelly to put their stamp on the franchise. When discussing the VFX side of the film, Barba says that while *Romulus* is set between two films, "it still needs to be its own thing for a modern audience, but fully embrace what I like to call, and I keep telling my teams, the analog future. It's the analog future and it's the tangible, physical models. It's our practical models, it's our practical face-huggers, it's all that work, and then we also have to step in and enhance where needed. And take over in some cases where obviously we can't shoot stuff, space, obviously, and there's big stuff in Zero-G and things like that." In the same way that Scott's career as an artist enabled him to shape the look of *Alien* and its prequels with highly detailed storyboards, Álvarez's history with pre-vis also proved essential to getting the look of the film just right, and knowing where to use digital versus practical and when to combine the two. "From the beginning, Fede's vision has been to ground this in as much of the practical

effects, animatronics, and miniatures as we could, because he knows all that stuff that he's embracing. But then his knowledge of visual effects is amazing. He's truly a Renaissance man and can do the work himself, and understands technology, can show me something new and interesting and go, 'Oh, this is how I want to apply it.' So, we're really using every new piece of technology you can imagine to make this film," Barba adds.

Kiszelly, who worked with Álvarez on *Don't Breathe* and *Don't Breathe 2*, also highlighted the collaborative process between the teams. "From the first moment, Fede was asking for as many practical effects as he could get." But nearly all of those practical effects were achieved in unison with the VFX and animatronics departments, especially in the case of the Facehuggers, which I'm told there's no shortage of, and you can draw your own conclusions about what that means. In terms of the challenges that practical effects and gags can create, like the infamous chest-burster scene in the original film, Kiszelly says one of the benefits of practical effects now is the wider selection of materials and the different angles in which a shot can be captured. While some of the same techniques that were used in 1979 are still in play today, Kiszelly attests that a lot has changed over the



RAIN (CAILEE SPAENY) AND ANDY (DAVID JONSSON) FACE OFF AGAINST A XENOMORPH THREAT. GOOD LUCK WITH THAT.



KAY (ISABELA MERCED)
HAS GONE THROUGH
IT. NOW LET'S HOPE
THE XENOMORPH
DOESN'T GO
THROUGH HER.

“FOR THE STORY
WE WANT TO
TELL, IT MADE
COMPLETE
SENSE THAT
ALIEN ROMULUS
TAKES PLACE
A FEW YEARS
AFTER THE
FIRST ONE.”

- Fede Álvarez

past 20 years. Surprisingly, he credits computers for being a big breakthrough in practical effects. “I’m not talking about computer generating effects, I’m talking about computer drive, even the kind of equipment, what we are using. And then we can provide physical effects with controlled movements, which can help visual effects as well, and these LED screens. But I think that’s the future – still a long way to go to make it perfect.” Maybe so, but it’s hard not to get excited when Kiszelly says, “the majority of the gags, they’re not only blood, but any kind of body fluid. You’ll see...”

So where does the Xenomorph stand today? Does it still scare those younger than us, who already have more to fear? Is it still impactful to younger generations, those set to inherit this world and all the horrors man has unleashed on it? Ridley Scott remembers watching the early audience test screenings of *Alien* and seeing people nearly under their seats with terror. “I thought, this can’t be healthy,” he says. And yet, the beast was one of the last great original

monsters, as the ‘80s brought on more masked men, and the ‘90s began to unmask them. When I mention how much horror has changed, how infrequent it is to be terrified by an alien rather than human nature, Scott ponders it for a moment. “What is it about that? I don’t like it and most horror boils down to some terrible sex crime. What is the matter with us? We are obsessed with this idea and I think it’s very unhealthy.” It’s an intriguing response; after all, *Alien* has been the subject of numerous analyses regarding the sexual allegory within the franchise, and Álvarez himself has left a stamp on the monstrous and sexually violent nature of man with *Don’t Breathe*, and as story writer on *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (2022). Ironically, it was Tobe Hooper’s 1974 original, *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, that established a boundary for what Scott wanted to achieve with *Alien*. “Sorry, Tobe, but I thought it was too much. I was shocked, honestly. So are a lot of people, regardless if it’s a classic, but it becomes sick. At what moment does something become sick?” We never land

on an answer, though Scott does conclude that *Deliverance* was a much better version of *Texas Chain Saw*. “I was dismayed rather than horrified, frankly. There’s a difference.” Was any of this on his mind as he pursued *Alien: Romulus* with Fede Álvarez? “No. I think *Alien* was purely about the beast. I was just curious about the need to be frightened to death.” It’s a need audiences of any age still seek, if only to put the horrors of the real world in perspective and fight back.

In discussing this topic with Álvarez, he lands on a different conclusion, highlighting the importance of fearing both the man and the monster. “I think when monsters become fully non-human or just not even humanoid, it’s something else. And maybe in this day and age, it depends what that is. I don’t know how scary that would be, for me at least. But I think what I find terrifying is the human aspect of the film and we do explore that in depth. I cannot go too in-depth [here], but I’ll say it’s a spoiler, and I think the scariest part of the movie has to do with the most human aspect of the monster.” But where the filmmakers, several generations removed from each other, do align, is that in every way *Alien* and its subsequent entries have been analyzed – fear of corporate greed, psychosexual nightmares, looking at people as numbers, putting our faith in AI – at the end of the day, the success of the franchise is because it’s downright scary. It’s the thing we see on TV at a young age that follows us, changes us and, like Álvarez, allows us to project our own fears onto it. Or perhaps, there’s a purity to *Alien*’s brand of fear that is generational because at the end of the day it’s not much different from that fear of the dark we carry all our lives.

To put it more simply, we only need to turn to the wisdom of Ridley Scott. “I always thought it was a B-movie. You got seven people locked in a tin can, and who gets killed first? That’s what it is. It turned out to be one of the most important B-movies in history.” 🧟



HELL AMONG THE STARS

A Journey Through the
ALIEN Franchise

BY RICHARD NEWBY

INTERROGATING ONE OF HORROR AND SCIENCE FICTION'S MOST BELOVED
FRANCHISES THROUGH THE MYTHOLOGY THAT INSPIRED IT.

It begins with fire and blood. The recipe for biological creation. It ends the same way. The recipe for biological destruction. These elements come in the form of passion, torches or flamethrowers, sacrifice, eagle-bitten livers or acidic blood, and they are the foundations of our myths on genesis and annihilation, on gods and demons, the keys to our most beautiful dreams of paradise, and our most horrifying visions of the underworld. Regardless of how we choose to categorize them – folklore, religion, superstition – these myths all share a commonality, one that is the only power we truly have over life and death: storytelling and truth.

From B-movie dreams to the creation of one of the most influential works of both science fiction and horror, *Alien* and its subsequent franchise entries are a compilation of such stories. Mythmakers Dan O'Bannon, Ronald Shuseff, H.R. Giger, and Ridley Scott conjured a demon both futuristic and ancient, combining their love of Greco-Roman mythology, Lovecraftian beings, Judeo-Christianity, biomechanism, and John Milton. Their demon has expanded to this day far beyond its original conceit – after all, “big things have small beginnings.”

“I ADMIRE ITS PURITY. A SURVIVOR...”

ALIEN [1979]

Alien is a response. It answers a call sent out amongst the cosmos. Ridley Scott has often cited the impact Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* had on him, particularly when it came to *Alien*'s tactile and grounded display of technology and space travel. But more than aesthetics, *2001* is thematically connected to O'Bannon's screenplay, with *Alien* working, in part, as a deconstruction of the future established by Kubrick's film. *2001* and *Alien* are cave drawings telling of mankind's constant quest to evolve and survive, while simultaneously prophetic visions of a looming future as we passively place our evolution in the hands of automated processes, corporations, and religions. *2001* is the hopeful result of staring into those depths, a satellite untethered to the restraints of humanity and guided by our most awe-inspiring

dreams of messianic guidance and salvation. *Alien* is an anchor, tugging these dreams down below the stars and twisting them into nightmares. As above, so below.

Alien's Nostromo with the grime and grease of its heavily shadowed, steaming corridors and biomechanical-looking inner workings stands in opposition to *2001*'s Discovery One, with its bright white sterility, homey comforts, and symmetrical spaces. The Monolith in its uniform simplicity brings enlightenment and ascension in *2001*. *Alien* responds with the Space Jockey on LV-426, which brings puzzlement over its origin and leads Kane (John Hurt) to descend to the mysterious ship's lower level, away from the light of the stars and into the mist where the alien hatchery, and ultimately the crew's destruction, lies. Also consider the dangerous presence

of AI in the form of *2001*'s HAL 9000 (Douglas Rain), which cannot be mistaken for anything other than a robot though it plays at empathy and even a fear of death, while *Alien*'s Ash (Ian Holm) has all the fleshy trappings of humanity except warmth and empathy.

Most significantly, *2001* leaves us with the Star Child, an evolved messianic form of astronaut David Bowman (Keir Dullea), who moves ever closer to Earth. Here Kubrick employs an eeriness that promises change and awe, the next step of evolution echoing out from the ancestral ape killing its rival and spilling blood under the burning eye of the sun. *Alien* offers up its counterpart, the Star Beast as it was called in an earlier draft. *Alien*'s alien is unknowable and primal, a devil crouching in the dark who fears fire and uses blood as a weapon. Its defeat at the hands of Ellen Ripley (Sigourney Weaver), the perfect survivor, tells of a humanity that can adapt by the sheer will to live, the refusal to be passive or put faith into the systems at play. By the end of *Alien*, we're left to believe Ripley does escape, beating the engine of corporate commerce and the biomechanical threat it sought, by way of her humanity. Rather than transcend and be transformed into a deified form like Bowman, Ripley's humanity grounds her in the realm of folk hero, like an interstellar John Henry, breaking the machine and proving humanity to be the perfect organism *because* of its imperfections.

But that is merely a dream, and Ripley hasn't been grounded at all. Instead, she finds herself pulled deeper, breaking the surface to find...



THE OG: ALIEN VS. LAMBERT (VERONICA CARTWRIGHT).
PREVIOUS PAGE: HARRY DEAN STANTON GETS GOT IN 1979'S ALIEN.

"WE'RE ON AN EXPRESS ELEVATOR TO HELL, GOING DOWN!"



THAT TIME IT WAS WAR:
SCENES FROM 1986'S ALIENS.

James Cameron's *Aliens* is a dark fairy tale. Ripley is no longer a mere survivor in the vast uncharted darkness, but a hardened warrior, sent by the corrupt kingdom of Weyland-Yutani, alongside the court advisor, Burke (Paul Reiser), and the magician Bishop (Lance Henriksen), to fight alongside the knights of the Colonial Marines to slay a dragon queen and its offspring. And on that journey, she falls for the noble knight, Hicks (Michael Biehn), saves a feisty orphaned princess, Newt (Carrie Henn),

and discovers she wasn't sent to kill the dragons but bring one back to be controlled and used as a weapon. Thus, Ripley is forced to fight a war on two fronts, one against the kingdom that tricked her and another against that dragon hordes who could be the end of everything if left unstopped.

For all of Dan O'Bannon's grand mythic allusions, as highlighted in the documentary, *Memory: The Origins of Alien*, there is a level of unfamiliar intimacy in *Alien*, as co-workers and strangers bump into each other in

the dark, and the pervading psycho-sexual threat, the perfect organism, toys with them on an emotional and physical level. We don't know this story, and even when we think we do, the film is constantly shedding its skin to become something else. In *Aliens*, Cameron not only eschews this unfamiliar intimacy in favor of going bigger, creating a crowded hell out of Hadley's Hope, he also sands down the sexual edges of the alien, while creating a traditional romance and family unit that feels comforting and known. It's no surprise then that younger viewers connect with *Aliens* more than *Alien*. I certainly did as a child. Yes, there are more monsters, more guns, and more one-liners, but *Aliens* is built around the familiar, what we know and can classify.

Cameron as both scientist and storyteller pulls the alien out of the realm of Lovecraftian Old Gods, and gives the species a name, the Xenomorph, an origin in their means of reproduction, and likens them to insects, a hierarchy and biology we can understand on a more basic, childlike level. Yes, the Xenomorph remains as dangerous and iconic as ever, but not quite so comprised of nightmares and guesswork as it was in Scott's film.

Aliens allows Ripley to journey further into hell with a safety net and the promise of return. Even as Ripley takes the elevator to the basin of the terraforming station to rescue Newt, as the structure is rocked by explosions and fire laps at her heels, there is this pervading feeling that nothing too bad will happen because this is a story of heroes and monsters, and Cameron is enamored with this hero, her power and strength, to the point where he gives her imposing new armor in the final act, just to ensure her survival. This is a tale that invites cheers from rapt audiences, a tale that ends with the promise of safety and no more monsters as Hicks, Newt, and Ripley fall asleep in their cryotubes. It's a bedtime story that even Ripley allows herself to believe in. Do we truly believe the universe has been rid of monsters, just like that? No. Yet, we accept it and want it to be true because...





“FUCK IT. WHAT ELSE HAVE WE GOT TO BELIEVE IN?” **ALIEN³** [1992]

Alien³ is a eulogy. The film immediately shatters the fairy tale ending of *Aliens*, as Ripley's escape vessel catches fire and crashes on prison planet Fury 161, killing off Hicks and Newt, still sleeping in their cryo-chambers, without giving Ripley the chance to say goodbye. The decision has remained a controversial one, to the point where Neill Blomkamp's proposed *Aliens* sequel was going to remove this film from continuity and take the franchise in a new direction with Ripley, Hicks, and Newt together. But there's no truth in that method, no blood and fire through which to recreate Ripley again, this time as neither survivor nor warrior, but as a prisoner of her environment and of the thing growing inside her, a new Xenomorph Queen. As Ripley tells the illusion of the Xenomorph she sees within the bowels of the prison's foundry, “You've been in my life so long, I can't remember anything

else.” This is Ripley pushed to the edge, stuck in the deepest level of hell. The prison foundry, a leadworks facility, is more hellish than any other environment within the *Alien* franchise, tinged yellow with a pervading phlegmy sickness in the damp recesses of the tunnels. With her skin clinging tightly to her severe bone structure, and her head shaved, Ripley is barely recognizable as the woman she was two films ago. Death has followed her and death resides within her. What hope resides in hell?

Surprisingly, quite a bit, as the prisoners have been organized into religious converts by fellow inmate Dillon (Charles S. Dutton) who serves as a spiritual leader among these men in search of redemption in the afterlife. Thus, the appearance of a Xenomorph becomes a rallying cry, a chance for the prisoners to put their faith to the test and beat back the devil. Dillon speaks of heaven, forgiveness and salvation

to his fellow inmates, who he refers to as “brothers.” Perhaps this isn't much different from the fairy tale Cameron told us, and the one Ripley told Newt. Some of the inmates even question the reality of what Dillon offers, but when in the lowest circle of hell, what else is there except the dream of going up? While Ripley never commits to believing herself, she is clearly taken with Dillon's words and their ability to form a key to free her from the prison she has found herself in, and that key unlocks her death.

Ripley sacrifices herself to the fires of the foundry, arms spread wide – intentionally alluding to Jesus' sacrifice on the cross – and she is swallowed up in the molten fire, her final descent feeling more like an ascension as she rejects stasis and cryosleep, and instead becomes part of the forge, where something new can be created and she can travel somewhere new to realize...



ALIEN³ REGROUNDED
THE SERIES AND
GENERALLY BUMMED
EVERYONE OUT.



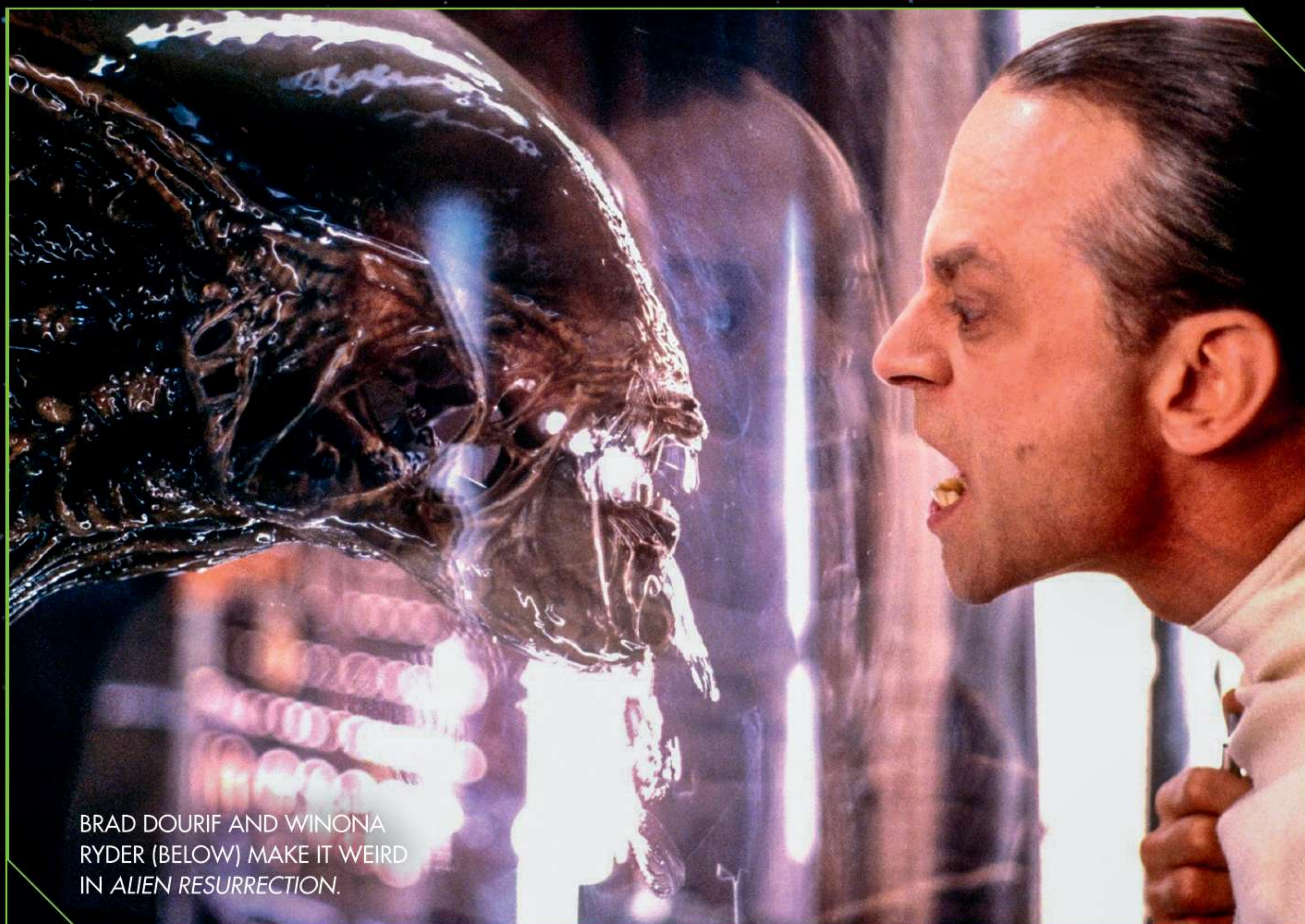
"I'M A STRANGER HERE MYSELF."

ALIEN RESURRECTION

[1997]

Alien: Resurrection is a miscommunication. Jean-Pierre Jeunet's conclusion to Ripley's story lacks all of the subtleties of the previous films and replaces them with the desire of the late '90s to replicate "cool" and "clever," which is its own kind of hell. While the other *Alien* films have remained timeless, Jeunet and screenwriter Joss Whedon were too enamored by the present to fully commit to the universality of mythmaking within the franchise. Still, as rough around its edges and soggy at its core as *Resurrection* is, it's not without some interesting commentary, and its flawed concept of trying to replicate what was relevant at the time is an unintentional meta-narrative as Ripley is brought back, 200 years after her sacrifice, by the United Systems Military, this time with a few updates to make her relevant to the military-industrial complex once again.

There is something to the idea of missing the point of stories, ignoring what they have to teach us, that speaks volumes in terms of *Resurrection*'s narrative. The USM is fully aware of Ripley's story, but all too willing to ignore her warnings that she was pregnant with a Xenomorph Queen when she sacrificed herself. As such Ripley is cloned and hybridized with Alien DNA, until the eighth result, Ripley 8, emerged as something the



BRAD DOURIF AND WINONA RYDER (BELOW) MAKE IT WEIRD IN *ALIEN RESURRECTION*.

USM believed they could control. After years of fighting Xenomorphs and retaining her identity, Ripley has had her body stolen, her memories lost, and been merged with the very demon she gave her life to stop, all to become a celestial Madonna to a new breed of alien, the Newborn. It's a perversion of Ripley's legacy, one Ripley 8 acknowledges as she takes a flame thrower to the deformed and suffering Ripley 7, and later destroys the Newborn bit by bloody bit during the film's climax. By the film's end, Ripley 8 arrives on Earth in the ruined remains

of Paris in what looks to be the longer aftermath of a nuclear bomb, another warning seemingly ignored. While the film presents Ripley 8's arrival as a triumphant moment, it shouldn't be lost upon us that all Ripley sought to prevent has finally arrived. An alien has arrived on Earth and is living within Ripley's body among the ruins of a society that feel unmistakably hellish.

While Ripley's story has seemingly ended for good, *Alien* has continued to thrive and push its connection to mythology, to past and present, and the stories that keep us tethered to both. Through *Prometheus* (2012), which hinges on the idea that "sometimes to create, one must first destroy," and *Alien: Covenant* (2017), which feels equal parts a follow-up to Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* as it does *Alien*, the franchise still relies on the stories the characters tell themselves and each other, the parallel and mirrored myths, prayers and promises. While we eagerly await Fede Álvarez's latest installment in the franchise, *Alien: Romulus*, the title leads us to believe he too will join the ranks of mythmakers and take us down another passage where hell awaits out there among the stars. 🐼





HOLLYWOOD ENDING

MAXXINE

**SENDS TI WEST'S TRILOGY
OUT WITH A BANG**

BY BRETT GALLMAN

Ti West's slasher trilogy has been defined by a throwback quality. Not only has West evoked bygone eras and styles by winding through '70s exploitation in *X*, splattery Sirkian Spanish Flu melodrama in *Pearl*, and 1980s Hollywood grime in this summer's *MaXXXine*, but he's also recaptured the thrill of unleashing a film on an unsuspecting public. In an era where information about film productions is more readily available than ever before, West prides himself on maintaining mystery and allowing audiences to enjoy his films with little to no preconceived notions, a quality he feels is largely missing from today's landscape. "We used to go see a movie and not know what it was going to be and have that experience," he reminisces. "With the internet and the constant entertainment news updates, it's very rare that a movie comes out and you don't know beat-for-beat what happens in it. So I'm trying to protect that as much as I can."

As such, he's reluctant to reveal too many secrets about this latest entry, which unfolded under more scrutiny than its predecessors. "We made the first two movies back-to-back, and no one knew about them," he explains. "Then we announced *MaXXXine*, but we hadn't secretly done it, and it's been really cool for people to not know anything about these movies. And all of that is to say, the less you know about the movie the better." However, he does assure me that fans of the first two entries should find plenty to like as he expands upon his thematic preoccupations from *X* and *Pearl*.

Most notably, *MaXXXine* continues the franchise's exploration of outsider art as a gateway to fame and glory. "A big part of each movie deals with how cinema affects the characters," he explains. "*X* is a grindhouse homage, but it also reveals that if you're not in the movie business and you want to make movies, there's an independent way of doing it. Whether it's with sleazy, low-budget horror/exploitation movies or porn, it's a way as an outsider to be part of movies and to do that as a way to change your life." West considers his prequel to be a natural extension of this, despite its different trappings.

XXX

“**MAXXXINE IS A BIZARRO MOVIE THAT COULD ONLY EXIST BECAUSE THE OTHER TWO TEED IT UP.**”

- TI WEST



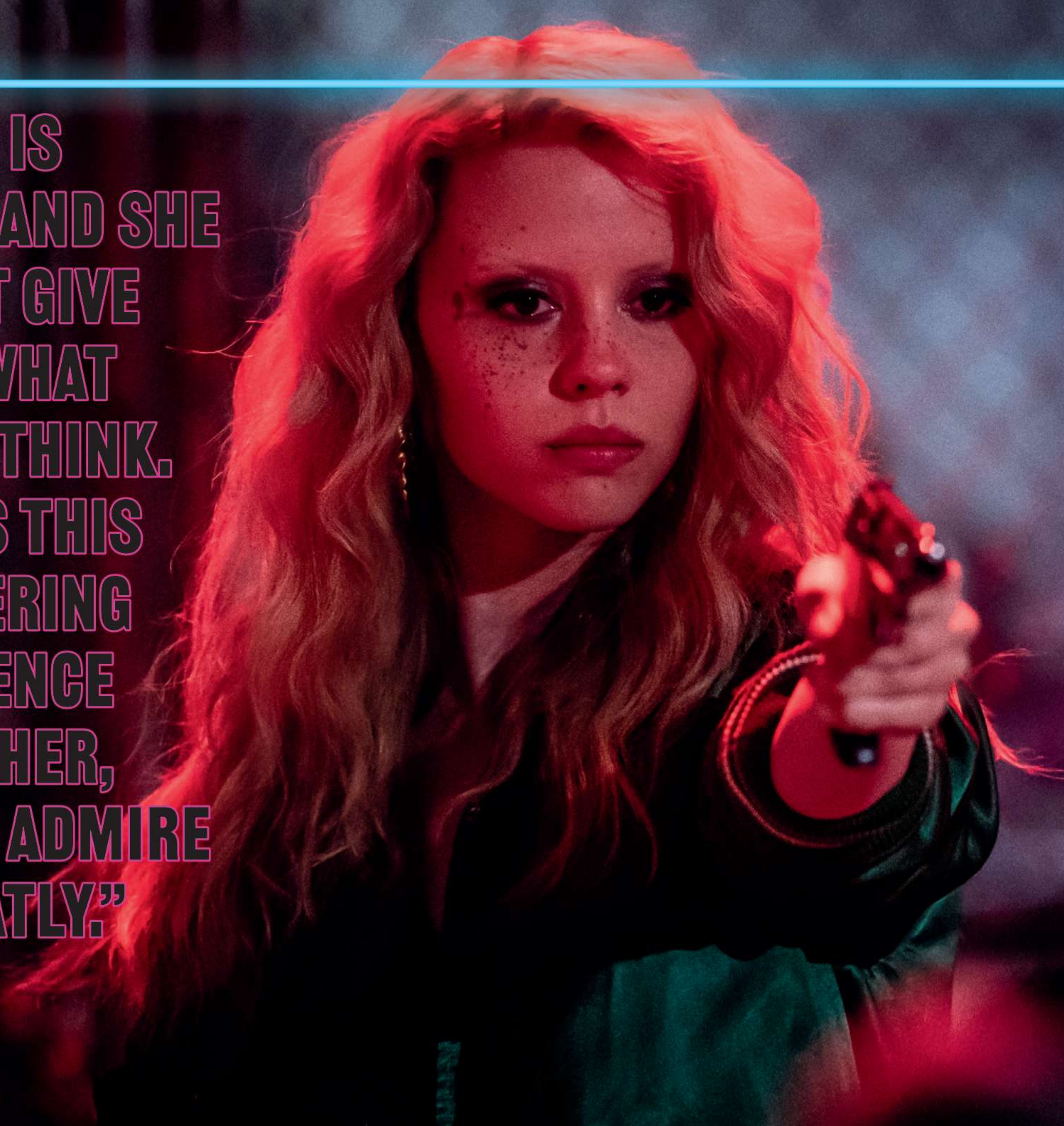
MAXINE (MIA GOTH) CLIMBS THE LADDER IN HOLLYWOOD (BELOW) WHILE PRIVATE DICK JOHN LABAT (KEVIN BACON) KEEPS TABS.



“

MAXINE IS FIERCE, AND SHE DOESN'T GIVE A SHIT WHAT PEOPLE THINK. SHE HAS THIS UNWAVERING CONFIDENCE WITHIN HER, WHICH I ADMIRE SO GREATLY.”

- MIA GOTH



“Pearl is someone who's inspired by movies and the awe of movies and what that could mean to your life from the outside,” he observes. With *MaXXXine*, he confronts a logical endgame by tackling what happens when the outsiders storm the gates to slip into the mainstream. “You’re now in the movie business, so how is that affecting the characters differently?” West ponders.

While he doesn’t answer that question specifically, he does offer that it will unfold with a much different aesthetic than the first two films.

“This is much more of a gritty, artfully done VHS-era movie,” he adds before revealing that *MaXXXine* finds its title character plotting her next moves as her past begins to catch up with her. “She’s at a point where she’s reached the ceiling of where she can go in adult films since she’s trying to get into more traditional movies,” he reveals. “That’s been a challenge, and this movie starts with her finding an opportunity.” West hints that Maxine’s discontent stems from being a different person than she was when we last saw her. “It’s still the same character and still the same

desires, but it’s like she’s at a different point in her life,” he teases.

Exploring Maxine at this new phase in life also provides another dimension for this franchise’s *raison d’être*: Mia Goth’s versatility in playing two different characters during wildly different times in their lives. West compliments her range throughout our chat and hints that *MaXXXine* offers Goth a chance to bring a new dimension to Maxine. “All three movies showcase different sides of

her ability and different sides of these characters,” he raves. “In *MaXXXine*, she’s not really the same person, and she’s certainly not Pearl either, so she’s an evolution of that.”

Goth echoes her director’s thoughts on Maxine’s evolution and considers her latest outing to be a culmination of the character’s quest for fame. “Of course she’s changed a little,” Goth confirms. “She’s gone through a lot. The series of events in *X* is traumatic, and she moves out to Hollywood



MAXINE SETS HER SIGHTS ON STARDOM (ABOVE), BUT SHE’S NOT YET FREE OF UNSAVORY CHARACTERS LIKE TEDDY NIGHT, ESQ. (GIANCARLO ESPOSITO).

to start a new life and sets herself up with no help from anyone. That takes a lot of courage.” For Goth, this courage represents an essential “truth” the actress sets to capture whenever she goes before cameras. While both Maxine and Pearl have been driven by that outsider’s desire for fame, Goth focuses more on their grit and determination. “Maxine is fierce, and she doesn’t give a shit what people think,” she says. “She has this unwavering confidence within her, which I admire so greatly. She knows what she wants, she’s going to go out and get it, and nothing is going to get in her way.”

Despite not receiving an official writing credit as she did on *Pearl*, Goth insists she and West’s rapport still allowed her to further shape her iconic character. “This is our third movie together now, so we have a shorthand with one another, and that’s become something that I value,” she explains. “He’s always extremely open and keen to hear my ideas about the character and whatever scene that is that we’re doing. He always lets me do what I want and explore the scene how I choose, and he gives me a lot of space to do what I want to do.”

Goth is also excited about the vast array of newcomers to an impressive cast that boasts the likes of Kevin Bacon, Bobby Cannavale, Lily Collins, Elizabeth Debicki, Giancarlo Esposito, Halsey, and Michelle Monaghan. “I loved everyone that I had the chance to work with on this movie,” Goth raves. “I learned a lot, too, having the opportunity to spend time with such a varied group of actors and to see their process of how they are on set and what that process looks like to them. It was a real gift to have that experience.” West considers the large ensemble to be a crucial part of the film’s epic sweep. “I wanted a big ensemble in a more sprawling movie because the other two didn’t have that scope,” he asserts. “So bringing in an ensemble of colorful characters that were played by lots of my favorite actors was the goal.”

Among the most noteworthy additions is Bacon, who sought out his role as a private detective because he was a fan of West’s earlier work. “I was looking to work with Ti because I was such a fan of the other two films in the trilogy,” he reveals. “I reached



CHASING GHOSTS: VISIONS OF THE PAST HAUNT MAXINE, EVEN ON ICONIC HOLLYWOOD SETS LIKE THE BATES HOUSE FROM *PSYCHO*.

out without knowing anything about the script. We chatted and he said he had this role, and that was it.” He goes on to describe his character as a New Orleans detective who’s “a fish out of water in Los Angeles” searching for Maxine. Both Bacon and West remain tight-lipped about the character but promise he leaves an indelible mark. “It was a very fun character for him, and he’s playing something different than he normally plays,” West divulges. “He has a lot of memorable moments in the movie.” Bacon confirms that he relished the opportunity and credits West’s direction in bringing the character to life. “One of the first things Ti said was, ‘I want you to go far with him. I want you to go big or go home,’” he says. “I like that because a lot of times actors are afraid to take risks, so we get smaller and smaller and end up with nothing. And this is the part where I was able to go big and I love doing that.”

“Go big or go home” is the mantra for *MaXXXine*, and it’s a marked shift for both this series and West’s



MAXXXINE FINDS MS. MINX PURSUING HER DREAMS IN HOLLYWOOD, BUT IT'S NOT ALL GLITZ AND GLAMOR.

career. Early efforts like *The Roost*, *The House of the Devil*, and *The Innkeepers* established him as a master of an intimate, minimalist horror style that’s grown popular during the past 15 years, so it’s fitting that his slasher opus landed at A24, a studio that’s thrived on such fare. West is appreciative of the studio for supporting his vision of this trilogy as it blossomed during production on

X. “I had the idea for the third movie, so I pitched it to A24 and they said, ‘We love the ‘80s one. That seems like a great sequel. Why don’t we just see how *X* does and then we’ll make that?’ which is a very reasonable thing to say,” he explains. “But I thought *MaXXXine* was better as part three,” something West remained adamant about when the studio offered to shoot *Pearl* later. “I told them we’ll never do

WHAT, DID YOU THINK WE WEREN'T GONNA PUBLISH THIS PIC OF LEON (MOSES SUMNEY) READING FANGO? THINK AGAIN.



WALKING THE WALK: MAXINE WILL DO WHATEVER IT TAKES TO EARN HER SPOT ON THE BACKLOT (BELOW) AND ON THE RED CARPET.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF STARMARKER STUDIOS LLC AND A24 (FACING & TOP LEFT) BY JUSTIN LUBIN (BOTTOM RIGHT) BY DONS LENS

it. We'll never rebuild this whole world to do that. So, I think we either should do *Pearl*, or we just shouldn't do it at all. And credit to A24, they said, 'Okay, let's do *Pearl*.'"

The studio's trust has paid off with a trilogy capper that West bills as his most ambitious movie yet. "It's certainly the biggest movie I've made by more than double, in both budget and scope," he offers. "It was a huge endeavor, and the movie looks like three times its budget." That expanded scope is evident in the noticeable change of scenery, which moves away from the familiar farmstead of *X* and *Pearl* to the glamorous world of Los Angeles. "We shot everywhere, in every famous location in Hollywood that you can imagine, which is very difficult to do in a short period of time," West says. "It's extremely difficult, and a lot of work to pull it off, but the only way





DETECTIVE WILLIAMS (MICHELE MONAGHAN) TAKES AIM AT A KILLER (OR TWO?) PROWLING HOLLYWOOD.

I could think of to stick the landing on this trilogy was to have the last movie blow it all out."

West sees Hollywood as a natural final destination for a series that's been so enamored with the movies. "MaXXXine taking place in Hollywood is very appropriate," he notes before pondering its place in an eclectic pantheon of movies that includes the likes of *Sunset Boulevard*, *Chinatown*, *Vice Squad*, and *Angel*. "There are so many movies about Los Angeles, it's kind of its own genre, and there

are elements and nods to that in *MaXXXine*." West is also quick to note that he doesn't want to succumb to purely nostalgia-gazing homage when evoking past classics. "There are certain movies that I like that are influential, or there are movies like those that don't have that style anymore," he maintains. "Some of the Hollywood Boulevard vibe of *Vice Squad* and *Angel* is very much in the DNA of this movie. It's not an homage to those movies, but it exists in the same world as them."

The location change also represents a departure from the more intimately pitched mayhem of the first two films. "It's not really a set-them-up-and-knock-them-down slasher," West reveals. "There's more of a mystery and a thriller plot rather than a bunch of kids in a cabin getting killed."

However, he also insists that the expanded scope didn't inspire him to stray too far from this franchise's slasher movie roots. Rest assured, *MaXXXine* takes its cue from James Gaylyn's memorable final line in *X* as West's carnage unfolds in the shadow of the infamous Night Stalker murders. "I will say everybody doesn't survive," he teases. "And most people that don't make it, it's gruesome or memorable, in a very excessive, 1980s sort of way – and in a genuine practical effects kind of way." West also remains interested in exploring the potential of a genre that's known for its formula. "I want to flip the slasher conventions on their head. I want to subvert what you think," he asserts. "And *MaXXXine* does similar subversions of what people may expect."

After spending the last few years in this world, West is contemplative as he reaches the finish line. "I've been working 12 hours a day, seven days a week for three and a half years," he says. "I'm trying to leave it all on the



ANY FANGO FAN KNOWS WHAT'S HAPPENING HERE: MAXINE'S LIFECAST BY AN FX ARTIST (SOPHIE THATCHER) IS UNDERWAY.

field because *MaXXXine* is a bizarre movie that could only exist because the other two feed it up. I've been trying to get every last little thing dialed in as well as I can, knowing that I'm closing it out here. This is the one that I'll get judged on, so I've got to stick the landing." His star shares a similar sentiment about the film's status as a grand finale. "This is always what Ti envisioned, that *MaXXXine* would be the biggest, loudest movie of the three," Goth shares.

Like West, Goth is also valedictory as she reflects upon a trilogy that's been unique in the annals of cinema. "It's been one of the biggest gifts of my life," she exclaims. "I could never have foreseen how this was going to evolve into what it's become." This trilogy is a testament to how rewarding the creative process can be, especially since these big swings have been so well-received. "I'm extremely flattered and grateful to be a part of something that has resonated with people the way that it has," Goth remarks before describing some recent encounters

with fans. "I've been filming in Toronto recently, and people have come up to me in the streets to show me tattoos that they have of Pearl, and it's such a surreal experience. I love the horror community and these characters, so being able to revisit them was another gift."

Knowing the infamously dubious history of "final" chapters in slasher series, I can't help but ask West if *MaXXXine* is truly the end of the line.

"We'll see. Let me get through this one," he says with a laugh. "For now, this is a door I want to close. I want to put it in the box, and slide it under the bed for a little while." Time will tell if West keeps that door cracked open; in the meantime, mark your calendars for this summer, when all of *MaXXXine*'s secrets will be revealed during what promises to be a 4th of July extravaganza like no other. 🧟



MAXINE AND ELIZABETH BENDER (ELIZABETH DEBICKI) HAVE A PLAN TO MAKE THE ACTRESS A STAR... IF THEY CAN SURVIVE LONG ENOUGH TO SEE IT THROUGH.

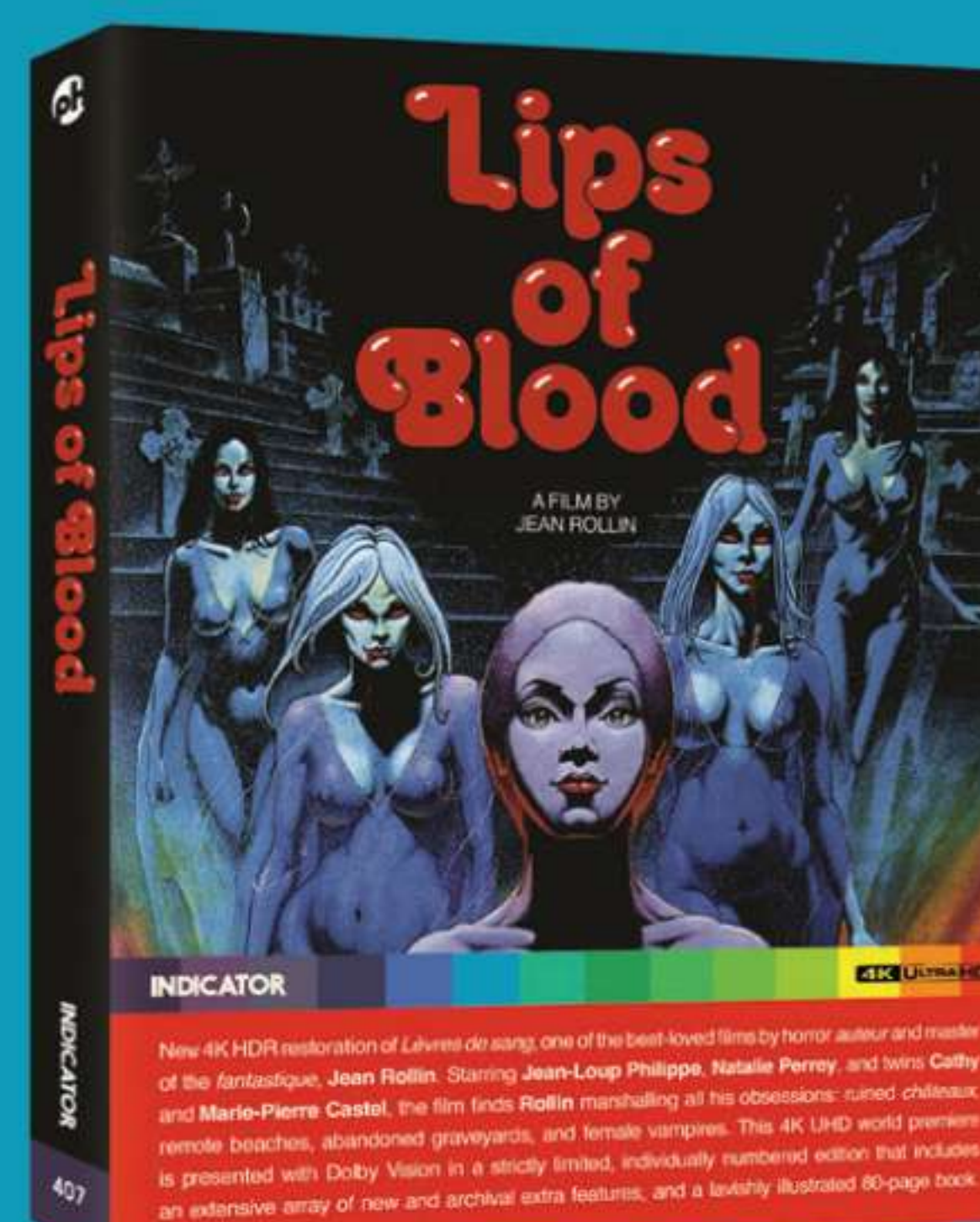
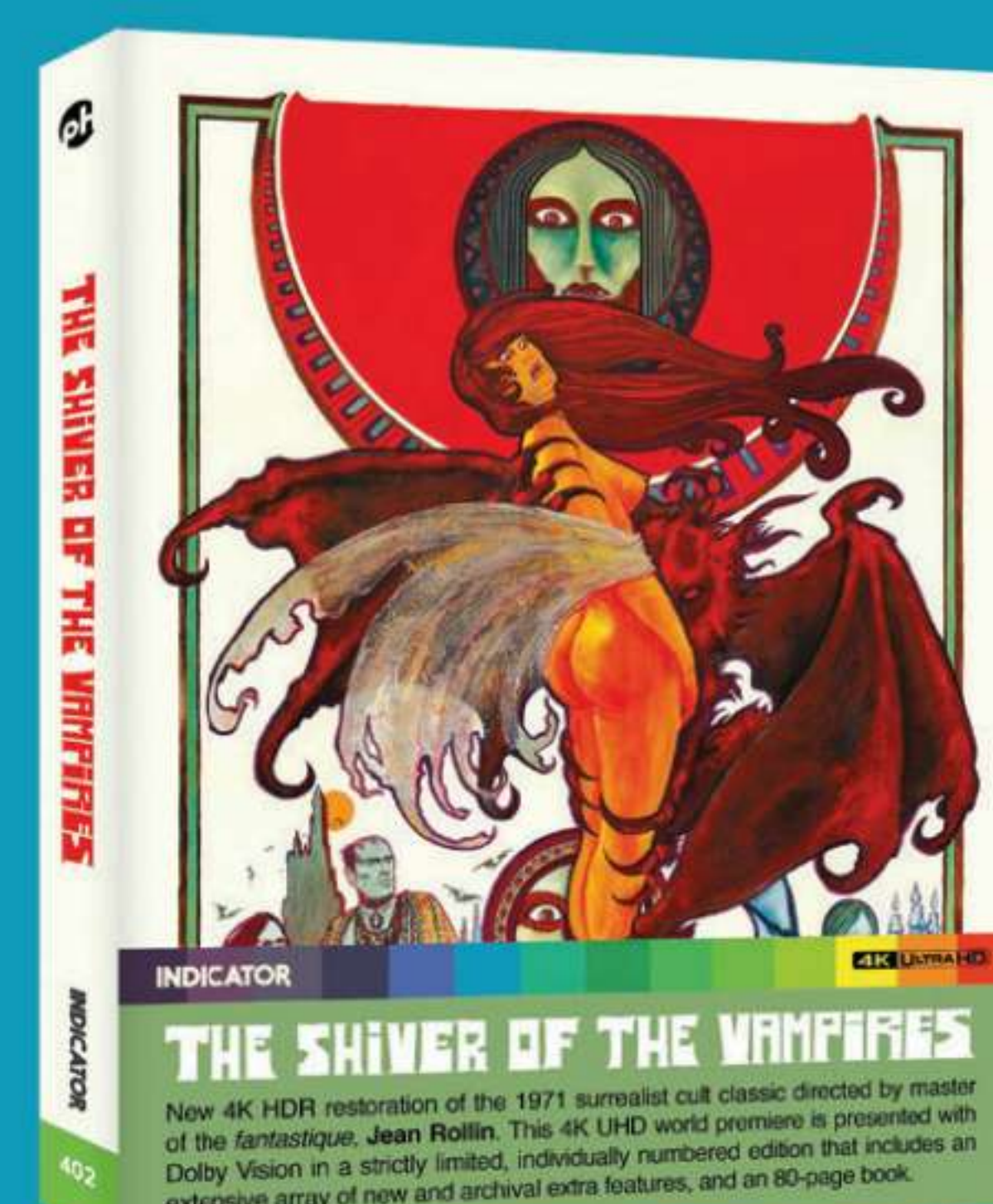
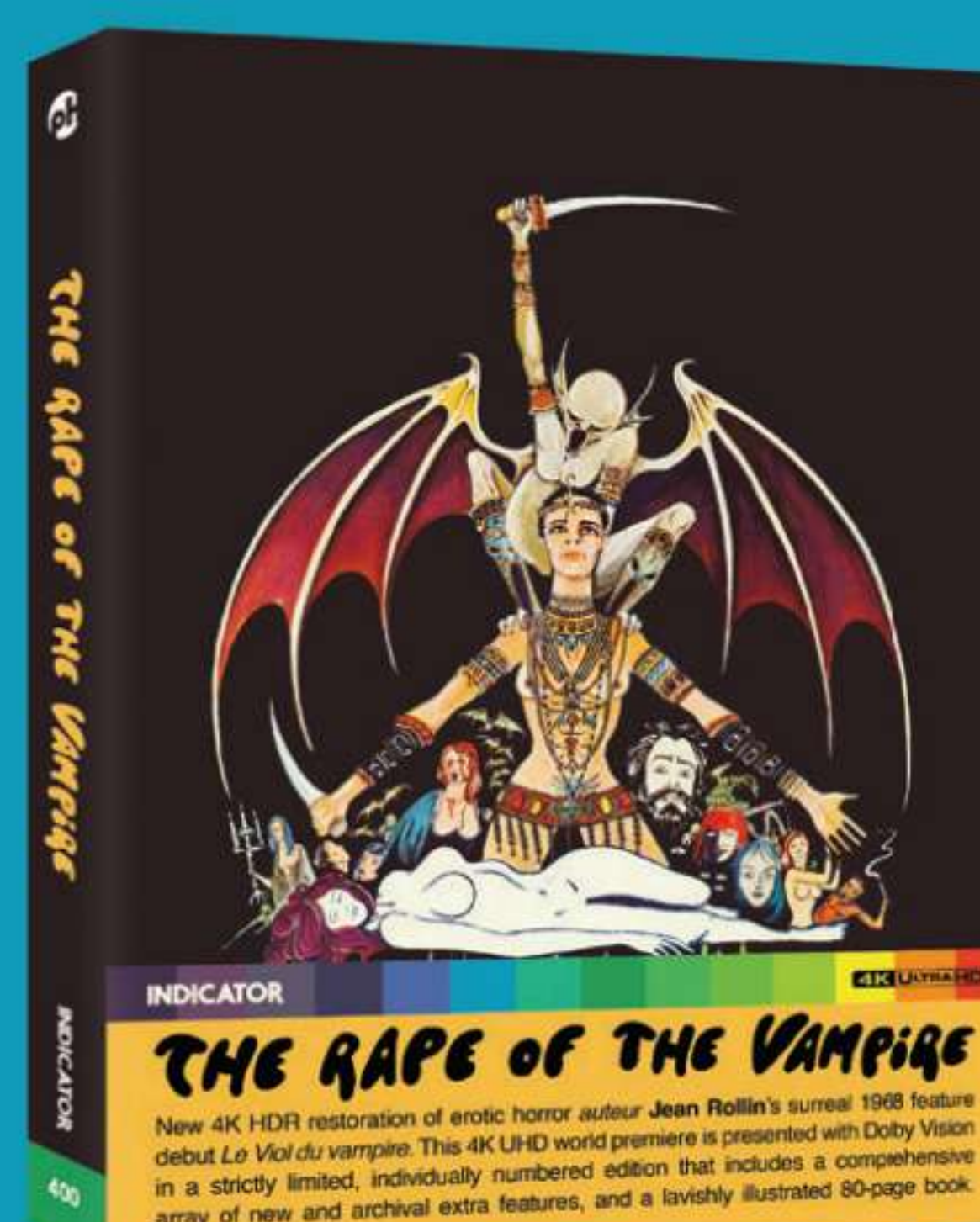
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KEVIN BACON GETS PRIMAL

The horror icon discusses his relationship with the genre in anticipation of his latest role in Ti West's **MAXXXINE**.

BY BRETT GALEMAN



Kevin Bacon's appearance in *MaXXXine* is the legendary actor's latest brush with the macabre. With appearances in *Friday the 13th*, *Flatliners*, *Tremors*, *The River Wild*, *Stir of Echoes*, *Hollow Man*, and *They/Them*, Bacon hasn't just been a tourist in the horror world throughout his 45-year career – he's a fixture of the genre, an icon. During this time, he's played slasher victims, misguided mad scientists, and outright psychopaths, because he just can't get enough of the energy horror offers.

"The challenges are always great [in horror] because it's life or death," Bacon muses. "You're forced into a situation where there's an intensity that you're asked to play. So even if I didn't like it as an audience member, I still think that I would enjoy doing that." He also admits that there's something about horror's primal appeal that's difficult to articulate. "I don't know what it is about horror," he says before revealing his thoughts on

the genre's perception to the public. "Horror is the only genre where people will ask me, 'How come you keep doing horror?,' which always surprises me because they would never say, 'Why do you keep doing comedy? Why do you keep doing drama?'"

For Bacon, the genre is simply a natural way to connect with an audience on that primal level. "I like to be in good films that make people feel something," he insists. "If one of those possible things to feel is to be scared shitless or on the edge of their seat, that's great. I can appreciate a great horror film if the work of the actors and the directors is interesting." Interestingly enough, his *MaXXXine* co-star Mia Goth shares a similar sentiment about working in horror, calling it a "disservice" to only look at her characters through a genre prism. "When I'm making a movie, it never really even occurs to me that it is a horror," she affirms. "My focus is on finding the truth of the character, the truth of the situation, and getting as close to that as I can."

Likewise, Bacon maintains that he's simply drawn to the compelling stories and characters horror has offered him. It's provided plenty of opportunity to show his range over the years, whether he's harnessing his magnetic charisma as a loveable everyman or as an intimidating maniac. "You could be menacing and charismatic at the same time," he says. "It's more a question of someone who's a hero or someone who's a bad guy. I can tell you that when I've played heroes, I've had a ton of fun, and when I've played some bad guys, I've had a ton of fun."

It's the substance of the characters beneath their exteriors that's alluring to Bacon. "The thing that's fun is great writing, great directors, and complicated men whose shoes I'm walking in," he remarks. "If I'm a cookie-cutter bad guy, and I can't get a hook on what's driving this person or what his idiosyncrasies are, that's not fun. But I feel the same way about a hero. If the hero is just a hero, who cares? But if the hero has some complications, some darkness, some history, some tics, those are the things that I love."

Before carving his niche within the genre, Bacon was drawn to it from an early age, when he encountered a

A YOUNG KEVIN BACON (WITH THE LATE GREAT FRED WARD) INVESTIGATES THE TREMORS.



horror icon in one of his most famous roles. "The very first horror movie I saw was *House of Wax*, and I saw it in 3D," he reveals. "It was with Vincent Price, and I went in with 3D glasses. When the smoke came out, everybody was amazed." He further describes how his love for horror continued to flourish in a way that will resonate with Monster Kids everywhere. "Going to the movies was a pretty special thing in the '60s and '70s, and I didn't always have money to go," he says. "But on television, we had *Creature Feature*, which was a Saturday night program with movies like *Creature from the Black Lagoon*, *The Mummy* and *The Wolf Man*, all those older horror movies. I was totally into them." He also takes a moment to shout out another icon who continued the tradition into the '80s and '90s: "Elvira – I used to love that!"

When reflecting on his career, Bacon makes note of two horror films he's particularly proud of. "From a performance standpoint, *Stir of Echoes* was a movie that I'm super proud of," he observes before offering a slimmer of hope to Graboid fanatics everywhere. "I love *Tremors*, and that's the character I've always wanted to revisit more than anything." He insists that the unaired pilot for a proposed 2018 revival of *Tremors* hasn't deterred his desire to return to Perfection, Nevada. "It's one of those things: never say never. I

don't know if it would be that pilot, but someone would revisit it and decide to try it again."

Regardless of whether that highly anticipated return ever happens or not, we haven't seen the last of Bacon in the horror realm. Between *MaXXXine*, Macon Blair's *Toxic Avenger*, and upcoming series *The Bondsman*, he's set to thrill and unnerve audiences even more in the coming years. He's especially grateful for the chance to work with West on his trilogy-capper, and insists he's "100%" earned his place in the pantheon of great directors Bacon has worked with, a list that includes Curtis Hanson, Joel Schumacher, and Paul Verhoeven. "He loves it, obviously," he offers. "And Ti's version of horror, it's not a run-of-the-mill slasher movie or found footage." However, he does have one question for his director about the roster of names Maxine cites as famous actors who got their big break in horror. "I always wondered if he had me listed in there before I was cast," Bacon ponders. "But then he had to take me out!" 🤪



If there's blue on
her eye, you just might die!

By Cass Clarke

Illustration by Tess Givnish

! WARNING

women wearing blue
eyeshadow can be
hazardous to small egos

From *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*'s Janet to X's Maxine, blue eyeshadow has come to symbolize something unique in the world of horror: a subtle nod that we have a counterculture queen taking the stage. When we see the bold color, we know whoever dons it will not settle for a life they do not deserve.

But why?

Well, it has something to do with the head-scratching history of heteronormative beauty standards and practices in America. Before the late 20th century made pink *the* color for femininity, blue was preferred – even Barbie had blue eyeshadow in 1959! If you were a boy in 1918, you’d likely be dressed in pink, as it was seen

then as a “stronger” color, whereas the color blue was considered delicate, which meant it was the color for little girls. (Ew!) During the civil rights era, feminists pushed for gender-neutral clothing, hoping to erode these flawed cis distinctions. Eventually, department stores marketed blue for boys. This choice was based on market demand, meaning blue and pink have never inherently defined gender. (If consumers had decided to all buy purple, maybe it would have saved us the future nightmare of gender reveal parties.)

In the '60s, wearing blue became a signifier of going against the grain of traditional femininity. Andy Warhol used blue eyeshadow for his iconic Marilyn Monroe prints. Divine donned blue eyeshadow like none other in the '70s, later inspiring Ursula's makeup. Soon the shade became an alternative fashion declaration. No one is born with blue eyelids: the look rejects the idea of being “normal.”

Eventually, the eyeshadow color went mainstream in the '80s and '90s, thanks to models like Kate Moss. But in horror, this shade has never wavered in its messaging: don't mess with her. The color is a signifier that this is a femme who challenges the status quo, rejects gender roles, wields beauty like a knife, and stirs controversies. In *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, Janet (Susan Sarandon) transforms from vanilla wife to blue-lidded siren following the evolution

and expansion of her sexuality. In *The Love Witch*, Anna Biller's 2016 nod to '60s-era camp, Elaine (Samantha Robinson) lures men to their deaths through love spells. She weaponizes men's objectification of her, her eyelids painted that defiant blue shade. Several Technicolor-processed shots zoom in on her eyes, reminding the audience that we are always in her gaze.

A personal favorite subversive blue-lidded character appears in 1999's *Jawbreaker*. When speaking to *Jawbreaker* writer and director Darren Stein about Courtney (Rose McGowan), he shared, “She's basically the female personification of my own gay rage growing up in a heterosexual world feeling like ‘the other.’ I went to an all-boys school. In a way, *Jawbreaker* was my fantasy high school, with Courtney being the personification of all the animosity I had toward the world, hence her moniker: ‘Satan in heels...’ She doesn't just live life, she drinks it up. Red bustier, high heels, blue eyeshadow, jawbreaker ball gag in her vintage clutch, and a big stick popsicle for her boyfriend to suck on for her pleasure. It was about taking the mean girl to Russ Meyer's territory. [A] punk-rock-femme-fatale-cherrybomb hellbent on fucking shit up and looking flawless while doing it.”

Courtney is a character that vicariously gives us permission to say: Fuck that. There is nothing queerer in this world than having an unapologetic view of how you present to others,



WORKING BLUE: ROCKY HORROR PICTURE SHOW'S JANET (SUSAN SARANDON) AND X'S MAXINE (MIA GOTH).



bucking conventions, questioning others' insistence on how you live your life, and pushing others to do the same – even if it makes you unlikeable. That's a theme that connects these subversive femmes, even if their life experiences are vastly different.

As *Bodies Bodies Bodies* makeup artist Sarah Graalman told me, "Blue is not used on just any character." When I spoke with her about the makeup choices made for the 2022 A24 horror-comedy film, she explained why Myha'la's Jordan wears blue eyeshadow. "I wanted each character to have a specific 'look' that showed personality, and also showed how each character contrasted. Jordan was the one character we didn't initially have a makeup look for. At first, we decided she wouldn't care how she looked ever. (Even though she'd be jealous of Bee/Sophie, she'd never use makeup to 'win' Sophie back. That's not her style.) When I was establishing the 'party' looks on the actresses, Myha'la and I decided Jordan would want something fun to party in. She doesn't use makeup to look 'pretty.' She uses it like warpaint – to look more ferocious than anything. She wants to stand out. Where Alice uses glitter and gloss to look sexy for others, Sophie uses liner to look strong, Jordan just grabs a bright blue-green cream, and applies it to the crease only (not the standard placement), pulling the edge way out. She's a rebel and wants you to know it. Don't mess with her."

Given that *X* takes place in 1979, it's apt that director Ti West and makeup designer Sarah Rubano chose a cerulean blue eyeshadow for Mia Goth's Maxine. "I was inspired by popular makeup trends of the 1970s, which included the colorful use of blue eyeshadow which I consider to be a distinct, unique, and iconic detail of that decade," Rubano said. Maxine is someone who broke free from the religious restraints of her God-fearing family. Maxine dares to live life on her own sex-positive terms – killing to not

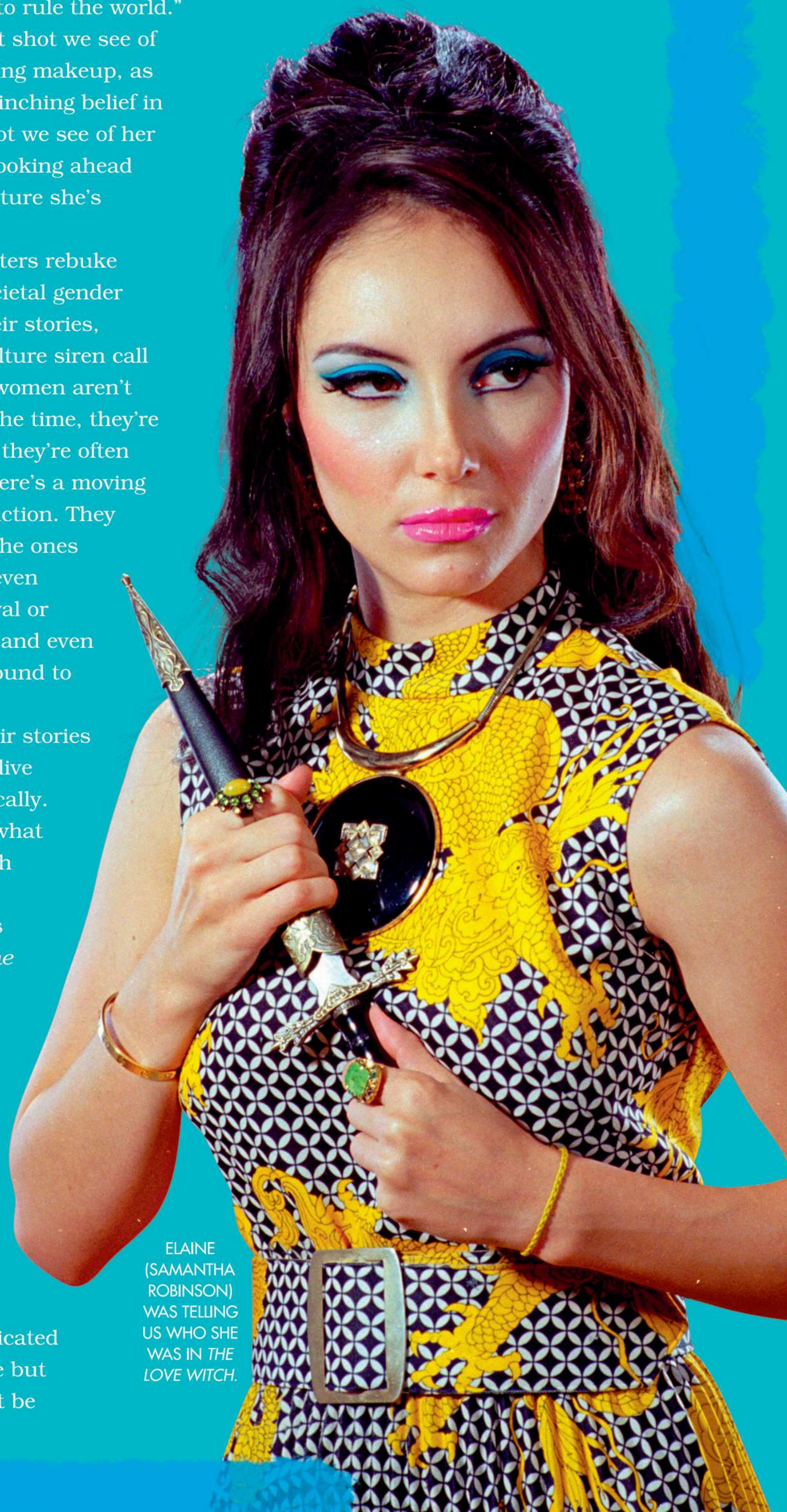
just survive, but thrive. In Rubano's words, "Maxine is desperate to stand out because she knows she's special. Her bold blue eyeshadow is her mask of power transforming her into who she wants to be. Her intentions are complicated and somewhat misguided, but her bold blue eyeshadow is war paint and she's off to rule the world." Fittingly, in the first shot we see of Maxine she's applying makeup, as she recites her unflinching belief in herself. The last shot we see of her in *X* is of her eyes looking ahead to the successful future she's readied to claim.

All these characters rebuke the trappings of societal gender expectations. In their stories, there's a counterculture siren call to embrace. These women aren't final girls. Most of the time, they're hardly beloved and they're often antagonists. But there's a moving power in that distinction. They persevere. They're the ones who do it anyway, even if the odds of survival or "winning" are slim, and even if there's no one around to witness it.

Despite how their stories end, they refuse to live any day inauthentically. At its heart, that's what *X* expressed through Maxine's journey. I don't know if West's upcoming *MaXXXine* will give Maxine all she desires. But we've already received something important from her. She, like the other women mentioned here, is a beacon, guiding us to embrace our complicated identities for no one but ourselves. We might be

surprised at the results, but isn't that what horror is for, anyway? Horror says it's ok to open that door, to pick up that phone, to see what bright or scary possibility exists on the other side of what's expected.

For so long, we've worshipped horror's final girls for their ability to survive. But the queer community needs more than just survival: we deserve a pantheon of femmes consistently reminding us to question who we are versus who we've been told to be. And their eyes are watching us if we dare back down from the challenge. 🧛‍♀️



ELAINE
(SAMANTHA
ROBINSON)
WAS TELLING
US WHO SHE
WAS IN *THE
LOVE WITCH*.

HIS NAME WAS JOHNNY:

BY
MICHAEL
GINGOLD

CHRIS
NASH
ON

IN A VIOLENT NATURE

THE WRITER/DIRECTOR OPENS UP ABOUT HIS AMBIENT SLASHER AND ITS VERY DELIBERATE INSPIRATION.

Following its theatrical release earlier this year, writer/director Chris Nash's alternative slasher movie *In a Violent Nature* hits Shudder on Friday, September 13. It's an appropriate date, given that Nash took a good deal of inspiration for *Nature* from the adventures of Jason Voorhees. Its villain, a murderous backwoods legend named Johnny (Ry Barrett), has a similar presence and m.o.; the difference here is that the camera literally focuses on him, tracking behind him for the bulk of the running time, rather than on his victims and potential victims. That gambit, Nash reveals, had a different cinematic inspiration.

"I'm a really big fan of Gus Van Sant's work, when he started taking that deliberate, slow-following approach with *Gerry*, then followed up with *Elephant* and *Last Days*," the filmmaker tells Fango while accompanying *Nature* at the Boston Underground Film Festival. "I really liked that, and thought it was super-hypnotizing. It roped me in when I watched it; it lulled me into unease, and I wanted to follow it no matter where it went. And it got me thinking, 'I wonder if there's a way to apply that to genre filmmaking.'"

In conceiving the setting for *In a Violent Nature* as well as the mask his killer dons midway through the movie, Nash drew upon the area of



THERE'S THAT VIOLENT
NATURE WE'VE BEEN
HEARING ABOUT.

Northern Ontario, Canada, where he grew up. "That region has a rich history of forestry and mining, so I just delved into that, thinking about how I could tap into that history to develop a slasher, and what I could cherry-pick from this and that to build a character who felt tied into that area. With that in mind, one of the things that caught my eye, years and years ago, was a firefighting mask from around the turn of the century. It was almost like a diving bell for firefighters, and I felt it would be really cool to throw that into something at some point. So those two elements came together, and I built everything up from there."

When it came to how Johnny looks without his mask, Nash notes, "I like the more zombie-esque slashers, for sure. We wanted Johnny to appear as if he has been through the wringer. We were always treating this as if it's the third or fourth installment in a series of films. So a lot of his disfigurements and the slash marks and stuff on his face are supposed to convey that these are the wounds he suffered in his previous movies."

Barrett, who has a number of Canadian fright features on his résumé, gives Johnny a powerful physicality that makes him a scary guy

to spend so much time with. Yet Nash reveals that he wasn't the first actor cast in the role – in fact, *In a Violent Nature* went through a whole first round of shooting before Barrett came aboard. Initially, Nash filled that part with Matthew Ninaber, who played the title role in *PG: Psycho Goreman*, on which Nash served as part of the effects team under director Steven Kostanski, who went on to supervise *Violent Nature*'s prosthetics and plentiful gore.

"A lot of the *Violent Nature* crew were all *Psycho Goreman* people," Nash recalls. "That's how this whole thing got kickstarted, when we were all on set talking about slasher films. I was like, 'This is an idea I've always had,' and everybody was pretty encouraging about it and said, 'Yeah, we should make that next.' So I had Matt in mind to begin with, and we originally shot a lot of footage with him. Then he wound up succumbing to an illness and had to leave the production. So we got some other people to step in and fill his shoes, but it was a really important performance; that physicality is key to the movie. When we edited it all together to see what the assembly would look like, it was very jarring seeing the different actors; they were roughly the same size, but how they



walked was different, their gaits. And in a movie that's essentially silent, and everything is sound effects, what really matters is what your eyes are focused on the whole time, you know?"

And so, the *In a Violent Nature* team went back and reshot everything with Barrett stalking through the trees. "There was one shot that we kept," Nash reveals. "Also, we originally filmed in a completely different location, like twelve hours away from where we ended up. So we had to find our settings all over again."

Ninaber wasn't the only *Psycho Goreman* veteran who wound up being replaced during the second round of *Violent Nature* photography; another was cinematographer Andrew Appelle. "When it came time to do the reshoots," Nash explains, "Andrew ended up getting hired to direct a couple of seasons of *Dark Side of the Ring*, so he wasn't available. But our friend Pierce Derks, whom we'd worked with before, had shot the behind-the-scenes footage of our original shoot, and he's a very good cinematographer, and he said, 'You know what? If you guys need somebody, I was there, I know what you guys dealt with, and I'm happy to step up and throw my hat in the ring.' And he looked at all the technical problems we had dealt with."

This proved to be a blessing for the production, and resulted in an improvement in the way the movie's long tracking shots through the woods



WHEN JOHNNY (RY BARRETT) GETS TO SLASHING, THINGS GET GRISLY.

were captured. "Originally we were using this rig called an antigravity system, which took up a big footprint. The camera was suspended from bungees over your head, so you needed at least four feet of clearance above you. Anything dealing with walking through the trees, we would have to cut a path beforehand that was long and wide, and it wasn't what I wanted. I really liked the idea of being able to go through the branches and have them whack up against the lens, giving the impression that you're actually in the woods, and because we had to clear such a big path for this rig, we couldn't get that. It was great as far as stability went, but it wasn't meant for walking through a pine forest.

"So we realized we were going to have to tear everything down to the smallest footprint we could," he continues. "We wound up using a

Steadicam rig that was super-small and built for 16mm cameras, which worked really well. It was kind of a hybrid Steadicam, and it was a little bit finicky, but it really helped. It just took a little bit of working out the kinks."

The final piece of the *In a Violent Nature* puzzle, one that solidifies its homage to the *Friday the 13th* films, is a late-coming appearance by *Friday Part 2* actress Lauren-Marie Taylor. It's a small but crucial role, and Nash says, "We always wanted that to be kind of, not so much stunt casting, but definitely a callback to the *Friday* series. We had a few actors from those movies do some Zoom interviews, just kind of feeling everybody out, and Lauren was great. She had full energy on the call, and after we ended it, we were like, 'She's amazing, let's bring her in.' That was a blessing, having her come on board." 🩸

AURORA (CHARLOTTE CREAGHAN) IS ABOUT TO TAKE PART IN THE YEAR'S BEST KILL AND SHE DOESN'T EVEN KNOW IT!





ILLUSTRATION BY GARY PULLIN

STILL SWINGING:

50 YEARS OF

THE TEXAS CHAIN SAW MASSACRE

BY JOE BOB BRIGGS

ON ITS HALF-CENTURY
ANNIVERSARY, ONE
OF THE FILM'S BIGGEST
FANS REFLECTS ON
ITS LEGACY.

If there was a crime called Franchise Abuse, *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* would be able to prosecute the film industry, the United States Congress, the cable TV business, most of the film critics active between 1974 and 2000, organized Christianity, the Colombo crime family, film censors in at least 50 countries, and dozens, if not hundreds, of puritanical moralists who, for three decades, used the title of the movie as shorthand for cultural depravity. To this day almost everyone who comes in contact with the movie makes some fundamental factual error about it, starting with the title: “chain saw” is two words, not one. I was riding on a Greyhound bus about ten years ago, and somewhere between Granger and Taylor, Texas, the driver suddenly got on his intercom to tell us to look to the right across a field where a weathered clapboard two-story house stood. “That house,” the driver informed us, “is where *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* was filmed.” One hundred percent of the riders craned their necks to get a look, and there were actual “ooohs” and “aaaahs.” But in fact we were forty miles or more from the film site, and even if we had been closer, the house had been moved in 1998 to the little redneck resort town of Kingsland, where it was turned into a restaurant. Obviously a local legend had grown up in Williamson County that made sense to everyone because of a dilapidated house that looked spooky. Even in the age of the Internet, there are people who will tell you “This is where the actual crimes happened” — usually in reference to the town where they live — when, in fact, the crimes happened entirely within the brainpans of screenwriter Kim Henkel and director Tobe Hooper.

So now we're celebrating the 50th anniversary of one of the greatest horror movies ever made — and we're doing it on the wrong day!

For some reason, devotees of the movie have been celebrating *Chain Saw* on August 18th of every year, because "August 18, 1973" is flashed on the screen as the day of the fictional events — it was a *Blair Witch* attempt at documentary realism 25 years early — whereas the actual release date for the movie was October 1974. In San Francisco, of all places.

I've written often about the movie over the years. I've interviewed just about every cast and crew member. I've met with most of the lawyers involved with the complicated distribution history of the film. (I did not meet with the Mafiosi who owned distribution rights to the film, because it was the same guys who owned *Deep Throat*, and by the time I started looking for them, most had been killed, imprisoned or locked into some kind of Colombo family *silenzio* deal.) I spoke to actors like Ed Neal, "The Hitchhiker," who were embittered by the shabby treatment the cast got with their watered-down "shares." I interviewed Tobe Hooper at great length and never



BEHIND THE SCENES OF A CLASSIC:
TOBE HOOPER, GUNNAR HANSEN
& CO. FILMING THE FINALE.

quite understood his ambiguous feelings about the film. There was always a "Yes, I'm proud of the work, but it might not have been worth it" feeling for the people who were involved with it. Actors took it off their resumes for fear that casting directors would hold it against them. Otherwise sane journalists talked about Steven Spielberg "ghost-directing" *Poltergeist* because "How could that *Chainsaw* hack turn out something that slick and commercial?" When Kim Henkel directed the best sequel, *The Return of the Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, later known as *Texas Chainsaw Massacre: Next Generation*, the agents representing Matthew McConaughey

and Renée Zellweger actively tried to kill its distribution, and for the most part succeeded.

The truth is, a bunch of hippies had used nickels and dimes to create a story so scary that it has five or six "walker" scenes — moments when people would leave the theater — including one at the two-minute mark, thanks to the eerie soundtrack and the expert flash-editing. There are scenes in the movie that have four-frame cuts, meaning the image remains on the screen for one-sixth of one second, just slightly longer than what the eye can process, leading to an unsettling confusion about what was seen and what was imagined. Marilyn Burns was



the first final girl, almost two decades before Carol Clover invented the term “final girl,” and four years before Jamie Lee Curtis starred in *Halloween* and became the popular perception of the final girl. *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* is responsible for so many “firsts” in horror and its inventions were copied so many times that Millennials thought they were watching clichés — the first counterculture horror movie, the first movie to reverse the usual city-country dichotomy and make rural America into the dangerous “forbidden zone,” the first horror film to use comedic elements that never become parody or satire, the first film to feature an iconic masked killer (Leatherface) as a monster created by the prevailing culture of the era.

So why was it shunned? Why were people so afraid of it? Because the free-love Sixties had turned into the drug-fueled violence-prone Seventies. It came out at a time when the country was splitting into two camps — people who believed that psychos with chainsaws were everywhere, probably because our godless hedonism had created a safe haven for them, and people who believed it was a movie *made by psychos*. “Where does something like this come from?” In 1974 you couldn’t be sure. But it was not from Hollywood and it was not from any recognizable American tradition. It was not even from any recognizable horror tradition.

It was, in fact, from the Brothers Grimm. The structure and theme are taken from “Hansel and Gretel,” because apparently there were cannibals living in the woods in medieval Germany, too. The church didn’t like the Brothers Grimm back then, and they didn’t like *Chain Saw* in the 1970s, either, but “Hansel and Gretel” has lasted 700 years in the oral tradition and 200 years in literature. This is in large part because there was no way to ruin it with sequels.

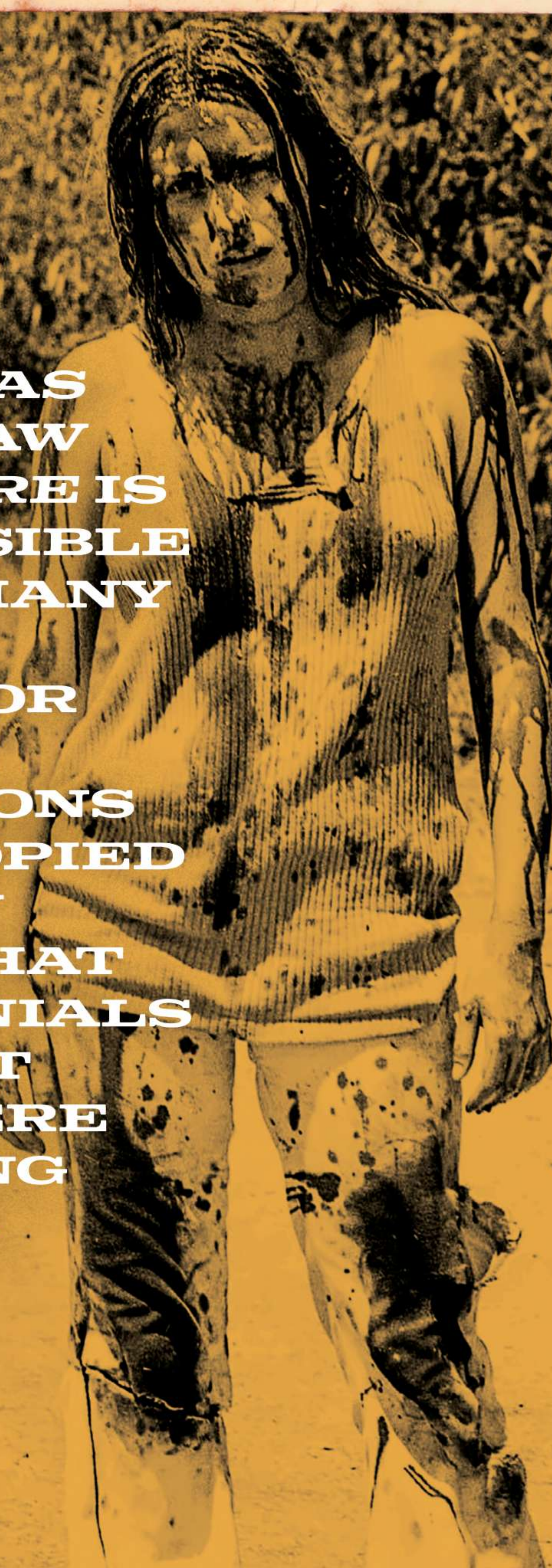
So I’m taking the long view. Happy birthday, *Texas Chain Saw Massacre*! Even though we’re two months early, we think the first 50 years created every kind of obstacle that could have destroyed you — including the sequel made in Bulgaria — and yet you survived. They don’t even bother to call you depraved anymore. 🤡



KIRK (WILLIAM VAIL) AND LEATHERFACE (GUNNAR HANSEN) SHARE A TENDER MOMENT BEFORE THEIR TENDERIZING MOMENT.

THE ORIGINAL FINAL GIRL: MARILYN BURNS AS SALLY.

**THE TEXAS
CHAIN SAW
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FOR SO MANY
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Immersive horror,
off-season scares and
the future of the haunt.

THE YEAR OF SCREAMS

By Ken W. Hanley



PHOTO BY BENNY MIGS, COURTESY RARA AVIS PRODUCTIONS

“Well, Doctor, I guess you’re just going to have to kill her again.”

The line provokes a wicked chuckle from an otherwise breathless audience, spellbound as an undead woman is strangled mere feet away from them. It’s not the most surprising development, given the depraved acts that set the tone for the unnerving evening, and the scene itself would feel at home at almost any haunted attraction. But this was no haunted attraction, and Halloween was a distant memory on this morbid March evening.

We had descended fully into madness in the midst of *The Birthday Party*, the latest immersive horror production from the East Coast-based Rara Avis Productions. Often executing their designs at the sprawling yet secluded Sands

Point Preserve in Long Island, these maestros of the macabre have carved out a cult audience for their discomforting theatrical experiences, which places you intimately into the middle of the proceedings.

“I want to create a horror show with a more sophisticated approach than just relying on jump scares, which evoke involuntary reactions,” says Jennifer Scott, the writer, director and co-creator of Rara Avis. “I wanted to craft stories that have a lingering impact on the audience’s psyche and make them ponder the characters and events long after the show was over.”

Whether it is transforming a castle into a waking nightmare with twisted takes on fairy tales or showcasing a hypersexual domestic thriller that ends in a gory cult sacrifice, Rara Avis has found success in flipping the *Sleep*

SCENES FROM AN IMMERSIVE MOVEMENT:
DANTE'S INFERNO (PREVIOUS PAGE);
EVERHAUNT HAUNTED HOUSE (LEFT);
DREAMS & NIGHTMARES (RIGHT).
FACING PAGE: DREAMS & NIGHTMARES (TOP);
THE CHATTERTON CABINET OF CURIOSITIES (BOTTOM).



No More playbook into something equal parts chilling and captivating. Yet *The Birthday Party* was new territory, literally and figuratively, as the two-hour show set in a never-before-utilized manor was their first produced outside of Halloween season.

Taking a cue from Grand Guignol, Rara Avis' spine-tingling work over the past seven years has been a natural progression of the live-action horror space. Much like cinema evolved from 35mm projection to the ever-changing streaming space, haunted attractions and immersive horror experiences have changed the way horror fans can blur the lines between their nightmares and reality. Though these thrills may not come cheap, the evolution has been driven by an insatiable marketplace, especially those fueled by a post-pandemic hunger for live entertainment.

"Haunt fans want something that's

never been done before," says Danielle Foreman, a former haunt performer and current haunt die-hard. "They don't want to just go through a haunt that is a twenty-minute walkthrough. They want to be a part of what's happening, especially if a haunt advertises that you can be a part of the story or feels like you're taking a risk."

For many haunt architects, the concept of a year-round haunted experience is one that comes with horror stories of their own, as ill-fated haunts such as New York's Times Scare to Eli Roth's Goretorium attempted to provide shocks and screams all year long, only to meet an early grave. But in the past decade, the pursuit of the white whale that is the sustainable off-season haunt has never been closer.

"It's almost like a lifestyle in some ways, and people who love horror want more of it," says Everhaunt founder Kevin Donovan. "Off-season events in

the haunt industry have exploded, from Easter, St. Patrick's Day, Valentine's Day and Christmas. I've even seen haunts hold events themed after the Solar Eclipse. In fact, our 'Halfway to Halloween' event has run annually for the past three years, and it's sold out every single time."

Yet the evolution of the haunt business is one built upon the ambitions of both the hunters and the audience. Transgressive experiences like The Blackout Experience and The Tension Experience have divided haunt enthusiasts while drawing attention from press and fringe fright fans alike. On a more traditional scale, haunts such as Pennsylvania's acclaimed Pennhurst Asylum have offered "Summer Camp" sleepover experiences that throw participants headfirst into a slasher film scenario.

"When we decided to jump into the realm of off-season specialty events,

PHOTO (LEFT) BY KEVIN DONOVAN, COURTESY EVERHAUNT HAUNTED HOUSE

we wanted to set the bar,” says Jim Werner, the operations manager for Pennhurst. “We added layers to our current attractions. We changed the soundtrack and the lighting. Even the actors act differently since they’re putting on a different show. If you went to our show in October, the shows that you get any other time of year cannot be more different.”

Even film festivals have entered the fray, with genre-centric film fests like The Overlook Film Festival and The Unnamed Footage Festival (UFF) highlighting Alternate Reality Game (ARG) experiences that take badge-holders into narratives that require their active participation.

“We wanted to create our own ridiculous narrative that had cryptids, evil corporations, fake websites, and puzzles,” says Madeleine Koestner, an organizer for UFF. “It’s very important for us to bring that immersive element to the festival because it primes people to enjoy our program and creates a bigger experience. You’re not just going to the movies; you might just get a weird book with clues in it that ties into the films.”

There are still a number of lurid locales that can be frequented regardless of the month, including the jaw-dropping escape rooms from Egan Productions. With experiences that take you into the Blair Witch House in Burkittsville, the industrial lair of Jigsaw or the balloon-laden sewers of Derry, Maine, Egan Productions’ blend of live-action performances, clever puzzles and Hollywood-quality sets revitalized the horror scene in Las Vegas and have given scare enthusiasts



the chance to briefly live in their favorite fright films.

“There’s something about a simple haunted attraction that doesn’t fulfill people’s needs during the off-season,” says Jason Egan, the founder of Egan Productions. “Escape rooms are a brilliant thing within the haunt community because it gives haunters a space to remain open all-year-round. With Egan Escape Rooms, I developed a hybrid model that combines a haunted house walkthrough experience and an escape room, so fans get the best of both worlds.”

Sin City is bound to become more sinister with the opening of Universal Horror Unleashed in Las Vegas’ AREA15, an all-year horror experience that aims to replicate the massive success of their annual Halloween Horror Nights events. Alongside the 2025 launch of Universal’s Epic Universe in Orlando, which will offer

a “Dark Universe” section with daily scare actors and horror-themed attractions, Universal aims to double down on the scale of their haunts, showcasing bigger and more technically proficient experiences that give horror hounds the most bang for their buck.

Given all that can go haywire for the traditional haunts within their marginal operating window, it is a miracle that horror lovers have more options than ever to enjoy their specific taste of live-action frights, whether it be the terrifying intimacy of Rara Avis or the big-money mazes of Halloween Horror Nights. If you prefer your real-life frights narrowed to a two-months period every fall, the good news is that the Halloween haunted attraction business isn’t going anywhere. But for those of us seeking our cathartic thrills at any given opportunity, the future is terrifying... and that’s a good thing. 📀





IT'S ALIVE!

FANGORIA

Early Days

By DAVID McDONNELL

45 YEARS LATER, ONE OF FANGO'S ORIGINAL EDITORS LOOKS BACK.

FANGORIA jumped into my life (and perhaps yours) in August 1979. I was studying advertising at Syracuse University's grad school. It was Saturday afternoon in downtown Syracuse, NY. Godzilla lurked in the newstand, on the cover of FANGORIA #1. I retired next door to read the magazine cover-to-cover, and immediately loved it.

Who knew then that in nine months, I'd abandon advertising to join the staff of a newsstand magazine, comics legend Jim Steranko's *Mediascene Prevue*? Or that I'd visit my first movie set (*Swamp Thing*) just a year later? That's where I met *Cinefantastique*'s Dan Scapperotti and quintessential Fango editor Robert Martin. "Uncle Bob," as he was known to all, was miffed. His managing editor, Robert Greenberger, was leaving to head a new sister publication, *Comics Scene*. Despite its comics origins, *Prevue* had just dumped comics coverage, so I was free to freelance for "Greenbob." I sold him a story, which led to my moving to the same NYC-based firm's flagship publication, the science fiction-focused STARLOG, in October 1982.

As STARLOG's new managing editor, I worked for editor Howard Zimmerman. The first challenge: what to call me? The company had a plurality of Davids. FANGORIA's Everitt. STARLOG's Hutchison, Hirsch and columnist Gerrold. Freelance editor Elrich. All were known by their last names, except Hutchison, who was "Hutch." I suggested we use my college nickname, "Uncle Dave." Bob Martin was apoplectic. He thundered, "There can be *only one* Uncle!" Like the Highlander. So, I was just Dave.

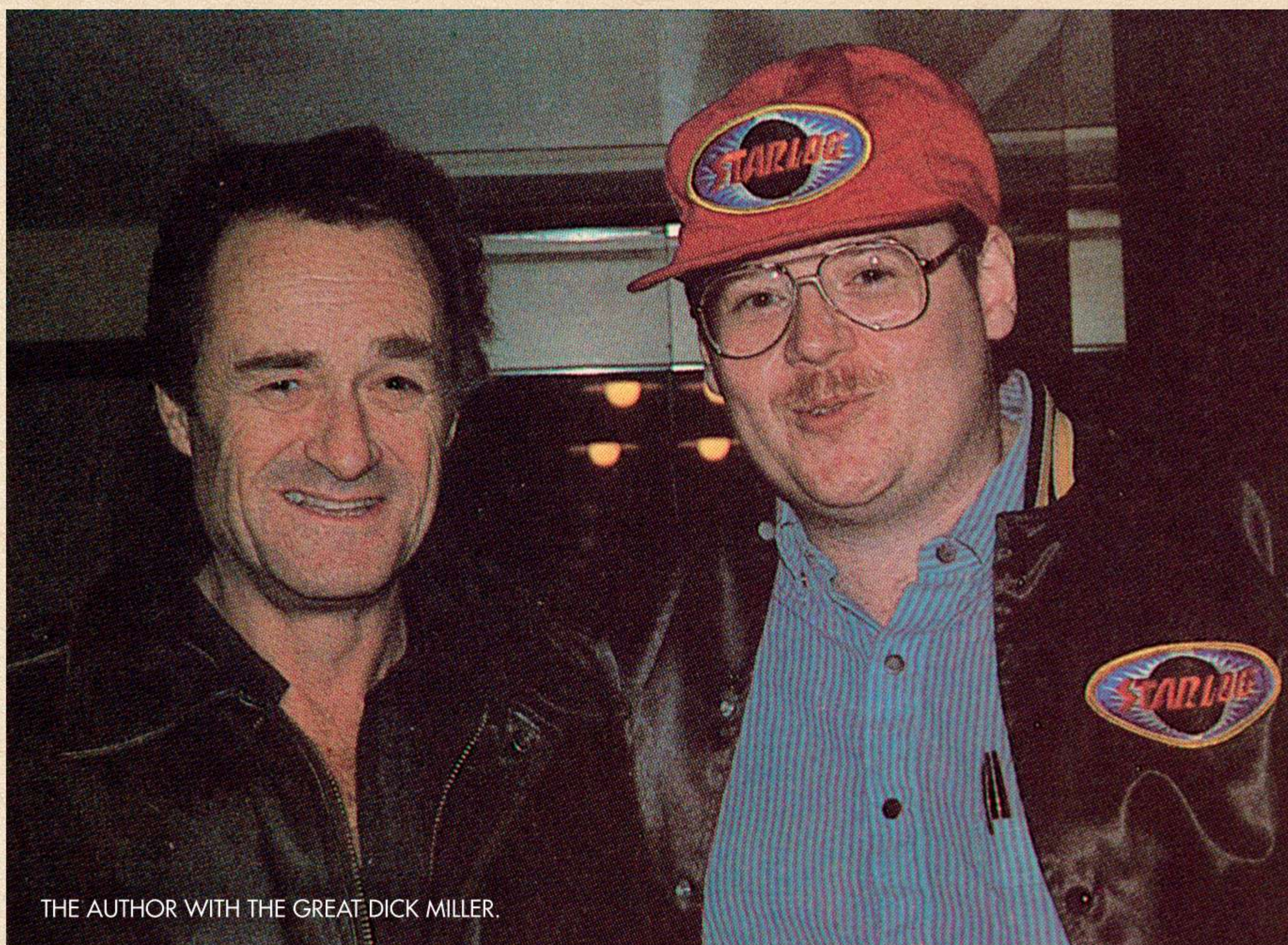
Truly, "Uncle Bob" was a larger-than-life character. He'd often complain that management hadn't sufficiently appreciated his role in shaping the initially floundering FANGORIA into an iconic success. (Well, he was right.) But he was also a prickly personality, easy

to offend and prone to stormy anger (like the publishers and, uhmm, me).

FANGORIA co-editor Everitt, on the other hand, was calm incarnate. I liked him enormously. A magazine pro, he was also invulnerable steel in heated confrontations with Martin over editorial matters. Eventually, Martin was offered the chance to help save a struggling sister magazine, *Hard Rock Video*. He exited FANGORIA with #48, leaving Everitt as sole editor. Alas for us, Everitt got a better paying job elsewhere shortly thereafter.

Who would replace him? I suggested myself. Now editor at STARLOG, I'd also serve as FANGORIA's interim editor for a time, showing the ropes (and chains and iron maidens) to young Padawan Tony Timpone, very recently hired and lodged in FANGORIA's office space. The publishers and Everitt endorsed my succession scenario. I would train Tony in all the dark arts of magazine editing: yelling at publishers, art directors, writers and publicists – then a nap. At the end of this apprenticeship, Tony would be editor.

That was my single greatest contribution to Fango. (My second greatest: I coined the "Horror in Entertainment" below-the-logo



THE AUTHOR WITH THE GREAT DICK MILLER.

branding.) I knew the right man for the job, and I'm happy with my part in establishing Tony Timpone as FANGORIA's longest-serving editor (1986-2010).

With Everitt gone, we took over in the midst of issue #50, still two weeks from the printer. With #51, real changes began. A new typeface. A bigger editorial budget. Putting out ten issues a year instead of nine. A wider pool of freelancers, with the addition of STARLOG veterans Will Murray, Lee Goldberg, Ed Gross and others.

One change I'm not responsible for: those photo puns that infested the "O" in the cover logo (#51-#59). That was Publisher Norman Jacobs' idea to make the cover "fun." I wasn't fond of them. And what's with some of these coverlines, like #58's "Stephen King

Retires!?!?" The man has published almost fifty books since then – should we issue a retraction?

As part of the job, I got to help host the inaugural FANGORIA's Weekend of Horrors, which was both fun and stressful. I helped reunite Wes Craven and Robert Englund (one on stage, one in the audience), spent time with Fango's longtime "The Pit and The Pen" columnist (and Ed Wood associate) Alex Gordon, and got to meet the great character actor Dick Miller (lionized in FANGORIA by Everitt). I even had my photo taken with Miller and published it (#53, page 46).

At later Weekends, after Tony was editor and I'd returned to STARLOG, I had no responsibilities. So, at the NYC shows, I was able to relax: I lunched with film historian Tom Weaver, drank in the hotel bar with *Poltergeist*'s James Karen, ambled about as part of my idol Christopher Lee's PR entourage and almost got trapped with *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*'s Kevin McCarthy in an elevator.

My favorite of the thirteen issues of FANGORIA I edited (#50-#62) is #60, and specifically the multi-story tribute to what I still consider the most frightening of fear flicks, *The Exorcist*. A freelancer's *Exorcist* interview was submitted unsolicited, triggering my desire to assemble magazine professionals' most beloved theme gimmick, an "editorial package" (several pieces involving one subject). After all, I had an unpublished Q&A with director William Friedkin from

STARLOG, shelved after his film *Deal of the Century* flopped. So, I re-edited it, cutting most of the parts having to do with *Deal of the Century*, and instead emphasizing the many *Exorcist* quotes and general moviemaking material. Plus we added new chats with writer William Peter Blatty, the possessed Linda Blair and exorcists Max von Sydow and Jason Miller. And, best of all, Dick Smith.

You see, I asked Dan Scapperotti, who had previously interviewed the legendary makeup master for *CFQ*, to see if Smith would be up for a new conversation mostly about *The Exorcist*. He agreed, so Dan and I drove up to Larchmont, NY, on a Saturday morning and had an in-depth conversation with the gracious genius, published as a two-parter in Fango #60-#61. What a memorable day! He showed us his basement makeup workshop, and all the life masks on careful display. Then, Dick Smith told us to look carefully up the staircase to a second-floor bedroom at the top of the stairs. We spied the Regan/Blair dummy sitting on the bed, clad in her nightgown, her spinning head stilled at this magic moment. Smith had the dummy on-hand so he could repair its neck mechanism for a Smithsonian Institution exhibit.

Those are my memories of FANGORIA, my brief run joining an editorial legacy including "Uncle Bob" Martin, David Everitt and Tony Timpone (and Tony's eventual managing editors, my colleagues J. Peter Orr and Michael Gingold). Both Tony and Michael are frequent contributors to present-day Fango, and David's son, Anthony Everitt, has taken up his father's Dr. Cyclops duties. Let the terror continue!

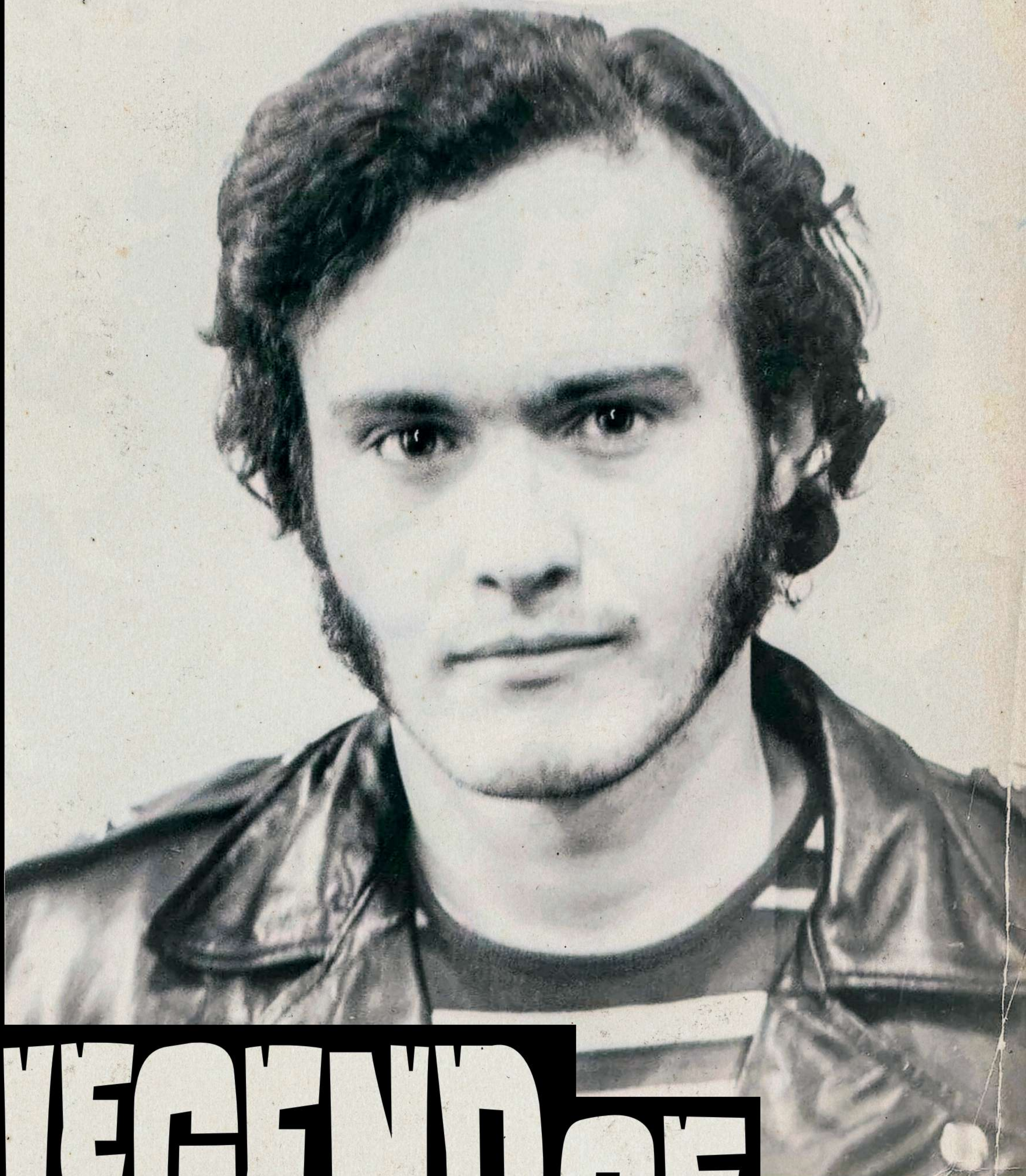
As for me, I'm retired and disabled. That's because Necrotizing fasciitis – infamously feared as the dreaded "flesh-eating disease," like The Blob on steroids – ate my left leg in November 2014. Chop-chop! I've rolled around in my Vincent Price in *House of Wax* model wheelchair ever since. Believe me, being a real amputee, one of the "Legion of the Limbless," is something out of a David Cronenberg remake of *Freaks*. "One of us! One of us!"

And I'll always be bloody proud to be part of FANGORIA's history of horror. 🧛





BY
CHRIS
ALEXANDER



THE LEGEND OF BILL(V) "THE KIDD"

A former Fango EIC sits down with veteran book, magazine and comics designer W. R. Mohalley.

When I first came on board as FANGORIA's third editor-in-chief in 2010, I was overwhelmed. Although I had spent many years as a journalist for a myriad of publications, I was a virtual babe in the woods when it came to actually making a magazine. I jumped into the deep end of the process pool, trying to make sense of everything that was being thrown at me and feeling the pressure, the threat of sinking below the surface and ending my run at the helm before I'd even had the chance to begin.

And if it wasn't for Bill, I probably would have drowned.

My friendship with monster mag legend W.R. "Bill" Mohalley was fast forged. He was initially my life preserver, patiently guiding me through the mechanics of plotting and planning the structure of the book, and somehow, some way, I got through it. And at the end of that first round, when all those pretty pages had been approved and the table of contents was in place and the package was sent to the printer, I received a single email from Bill.

It read: "Not bad, rookie."

My friendship and admiration for Bill deepened as I learned more about his legacy. How he stumbled into the business as a teenager, starting at Warren Publishing as their art director, steadily pumping out waves of remarkable and now iconic magazines, learning the beat as he went and defining the "look" of every Warren cover – from *Famous Monsters of Filmland*, to *Creepy*, to *Vampirella* and beyond.

And then, in the early 1980s, Bill became responsible for giving Fango its visual tone, making sense of photos, organizing columns, giving pages their flow and, of course, ensuring that each and every gore-soaked cover SCREAMED at you from the newsstand.

When I left FANGORIA to start *Delirium*, I would have the honor of creating something new with Bill, the two of us working around the clock to sculpt a book that bore the visual stamp of his almost half century in the business. I marveled at Bill. At his tireless work ethic. His integrity. His "no bullshit" approach to making pulp art. His almost total lack of ego.

My pal Bill, aka "The Kidd" (more on that below), is now enjoying a well-earned retirement, and it's my honor to shine a light on him and allow contemporary FANGORIA readers to learn a little bit more about one of their most important founding fathers.



BILL SHEATHS HIS SWORD
(BECAUSE THE PEN IS MIGHTIER).

Growing up, did you always want to be involved in art and design?

Yes! I was always interested in design, and I did very well in school. I skipped 8th grade, in fact. In high school, I took advertising and got 95% in all three years I took it. After I graduated, I attended the School of Visual Arts in New York, from 1969-72, majoring in advertising. I knew what I wanted to do. I just didn't know where that would lead. I didn't expect to end up making monster magazines!

How did you end up working for Warren?

After I graduated, I needed to find work. So, towards the end of the school year in 1972, I got my book/portfolio and walked up and down Madison Avenue, where all the advertising companies were located, looking for my start.

After not having much luck, I walked to the employment office, where I asked if they had any jobs. While I was sitting in the office, the woman

received a call, covered the phone mouthpiece, and asked in a low voice if I could do paste-ups and mechanicals. My slight white lie answer was 'Yes.' I did know what paste-ups and mechanicals were – I'd seen a few – but doing them for payment? No sir.

If you were so green, why do you think you got the job?

I had two hands that came with a body, and that was all that was needed. I didn't know until just a few years ago



BILL AT HIS WORK DESK, DRAFTING ONE OF THOUSANDS OF THE ISSUES HE CREATED OVER THE YEARS. (OPPOSITE) BILL MAKES A CAMEO IN THE PAGES OF FAMOUS MONSTERS.

that [editor] Bill [Dubay] was only a couple of years older than me. I note this because after a few days, he nicknamed me ‘The Kidd,’ which stuck; even [founder] James Warren called me that. After Bill hired me, I had to go to Warren’s office for the final interview, where there were covers from every magazine Warren Publishing ever put out. He would keep going over the last issue of each magazine, taking out the pushpins from the corkboard and placing the latest issue on top, but my eye zoomed right to *Famous Monsters*.

What did the job entail, initially?

My job was what they called a ‘production person,’ which entailed creating ads, pasting type and art/ photostats down on a board called a ‘mechanical,’ to be then placed on a printer’s board for a camera to shoot. I worked on the artwork for *Creepy*, *Eerie* and *Vampirella* on acetate overlays with registration marks, drawing balloons to place the lettering, coloring some stories with overlays, toning Will Eisner’s *The Spirit* stories and, after a while, designing all of Warren’s magazines. I was mainly in charge of *Famous Monsters* as art director/managing editor for Forry

Ackerman, which I did for ten and a half years. I also had to touch up artwork by Felix Mas, Reed Crandall, Maroto and any others’ work that needed borders to make the story flow or be better understood.

“I wasn’t just making FANGORIA and horror-type magazines, I was doing STARLOG, music magazines, wrestling magazines. Each one had to have a different feel as they were catering to different audiences.” - W. R. Mohalley.

What was the great James Warren like in those days? Did you get along with him?

James was tough. I remember that his office was the only one with a carpet, so when you were going to be lectured – which is really just a nice way of saying yelled at – you were called to appear on the carpet. One day, I got seriously harangued, and when I left James’ office, I saw [Captain Company head] Flo Steinberg sitting in her small

office, crying. I asked Flo what was wrong, and she answered, ‘You were getting yelled at so bad.’ I thanked her; Warren never really yelled at her that bad. Flo was a comics legend and had previously worked at Marvel for Stan Lee. She was a great girl.

What are some of the biggest things Warren taught you about the business?

That when doing a cover, you must focus 100 percent on contrast. If a background is dark, make the type as *bright* as you can, and vice versa. One hundred percent is the poor man’s Day-Glo. I remember that to this day. A smart, knowledgeable magazine man. And after all these years, I’m happy to now call James a good friend.

Working so closely on *Famous Monsters of Filmland*, you must have known editor Forry Ackerman quite well. What are your memories of Forry?

I have lots of memories about Forry. I first actually met the man in May 1975, I remember that because I was married that same month. I had been working on *Famous Monsters* for several months, after Dubay’s workload was so out of control, he dumped it on me. The way it worked was I would be communicating with Forry – who

was in LA – by phone and he would send me the photos and body copy by Fed Ex. After a while, Forry must have liked what I was doing because he brought me and my new wife – still my wife – Linda to LA, flew us in himself, and we had dinner at his house. A very nice thing to do. Anyway, naturally Forry took us on a tour of his ‘Ackermanison,’ down in the basement, with all those incredible artifacts from classic horror movies. It was incredibly exciting.

As you continued with Warren and *Famous Monsters* throughout the 1970s, you must have been aware of your competitors. At the end of the decade, FANGORIA was born. When did you learn of its existence and what were your thoughts?

I remember in 1979 I was prepping a new cover and had a 5x4 transparency of this amazing *Godzilla* artwork, the painting from the Italian release of the film. I was ready to start designing, figuring out what color type I would be using to make the cover pop. Suddenly Warren comes storming into the office, clearly not happy at all, and starts throwing around this magazine. A magazine that had the exact same *Godzilla* artwork on the cover and a magazine that was already on the newsstands! How the hell did that happen? James was furious. So FANGORIA became the new kid on the block and became *Famous Monsters*' fiercest competitor on the newsstands.

What was the first Fango issue you designed?

Issue #27... and I remember it well!

What else do you remember about that first year at FANGORIA? What was it like?

The STARLOG office was a nice place, I remember that. Great place to work, good friends. Great staff. And I just jumped right in, working on thirteen magazines a month, meaning thirteen diverse covers a month. I literally had to create a different cover every couple of days. There was always something going on.

Did you have a staff or were you a lone wolf?

Thankfully, I had an art department of eight that I had to supervise, delegating which artist would get which magazine to work on and creating production schedules for when to start work and when the

issue was due at the printer. Before computers, I would have to place a tissue-paper sheet over every layout board and indicate the color of the background page, the lettering, if there was to be a rule around a picture to make it more visible or to drop out type – making it white – from a background or photo. And remember, I wasn't just making FANGORIA and horror-type magazines, I was doing STARLOG, music magazines, wrestling magazines. Each one had to have a different feel as they were catering to different audiences.

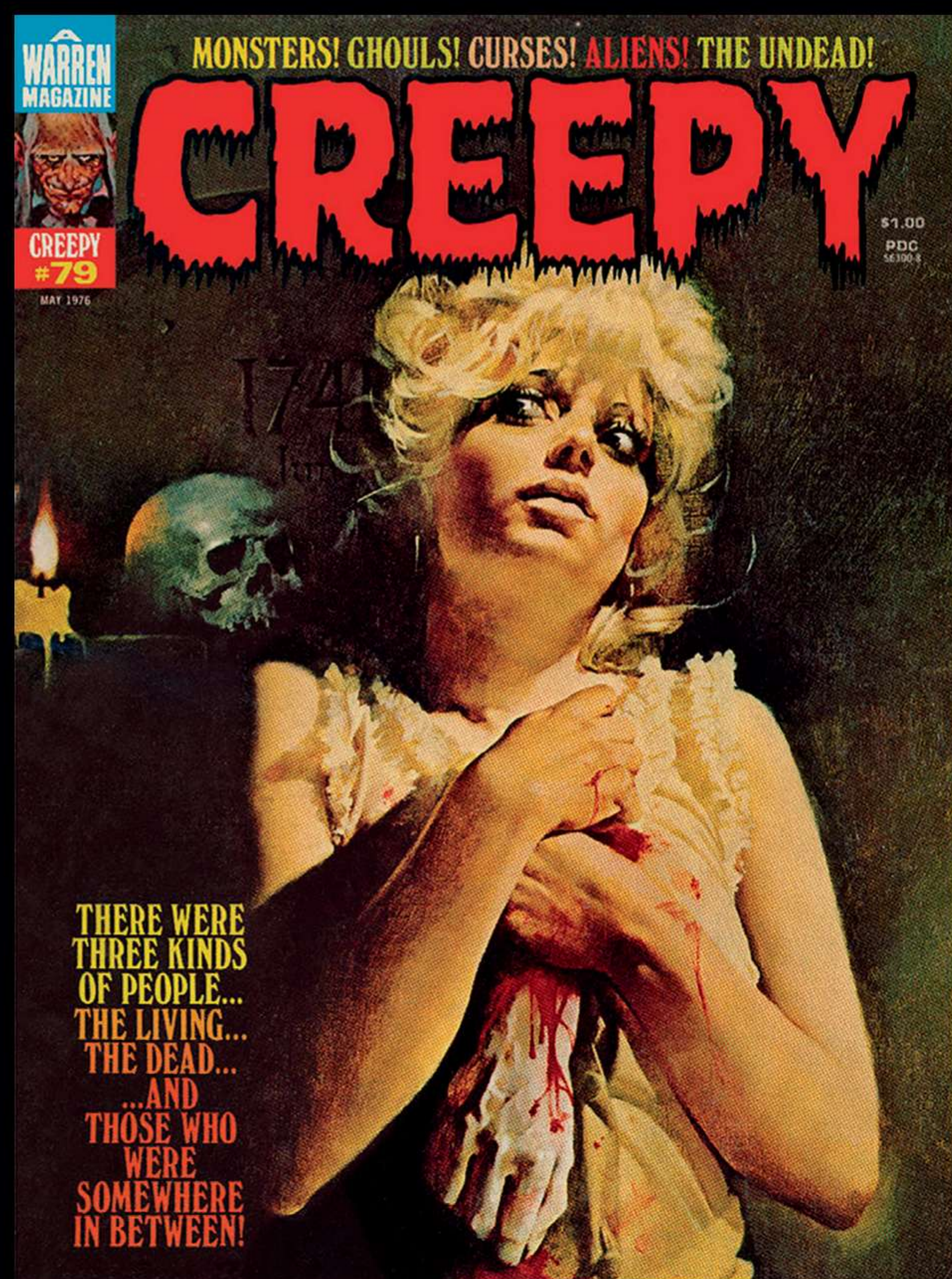


Fango had an editorial staff shift in mid-1980s, in that Bob Martin left and Tony Timpone entered. Was it a big change for you?

Not really. We just became a bigger magazine as time went on. And horror was hot in the '80s so everything was Freddy and Jason and the books sold really, really well. I would say that the '80s and the early '90s were the peak years for FANGORIA as far as sales and it becoming a big global success. It was a really good time.

What are some of your favorite FANGORIA covers that you have done?

There's so many. I always liked #195 [*Godzilla 2000*] and the Jason cover for #280 [*Friday the 13th 2009*]. I really like #323 [*Lords of Salem*], #321 [*Carrie*], #328 [Roger Corman], #298 [Gene Simmons], which, if you recall, was intentionally a tribute to my work in *Famous Monsters*. And I really liked our black and white cover for #311 and the [Barbara Crampton and Stuart Gordon] cover for #317. All unique and well-designed covers, I think.



What do you think your greatest strength was as a designer?

I think being detail-oriented – a nicer way of saying I am a perfectionist and yes, anal. I did not release a page until I thought I could not have done it any better. Good design is consistency; when working on an article, I always made sure I created a guideline for what I was doing and stuck to it throughout the article.

Now you're enjoying a well-deserved retirement. Do you miss the job?

Sometimes, yeah. Of course. It was my life since I was a kid. Hey, I WAS 'The Kidd,' remember! So yeah, I miss it. But I'm very proud of what I did. A few people have said that I need to be in the Guinness Book of World Records for the amount of magazines I have designed. I can't even count. It's in the thousands. So, I do miss it some days. But spending time with my family and my grandkids is pretty great, too! 🤖

This conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

THEN AND NOW:
MR. MOHALLEY TODAY.

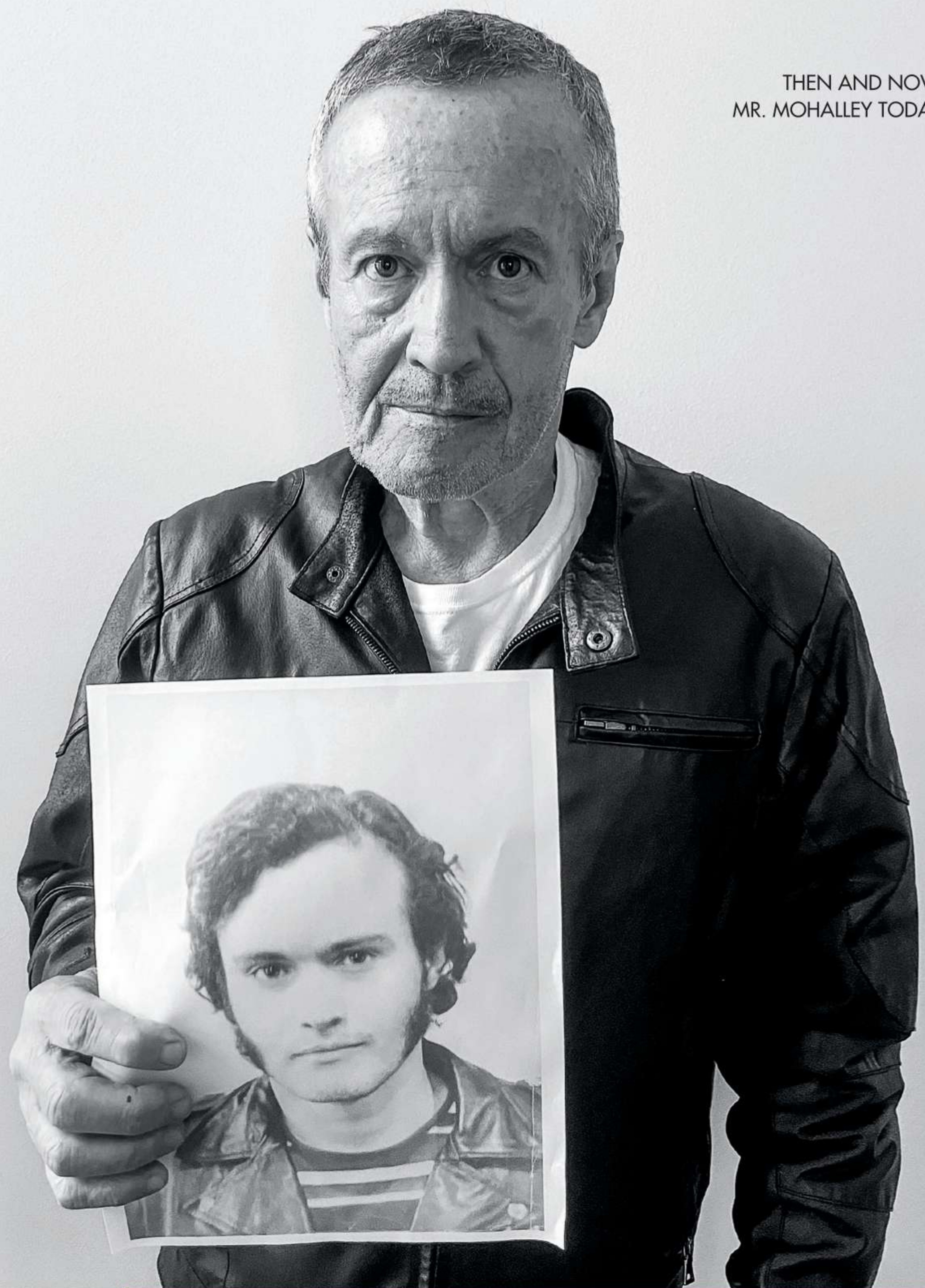


PHOTO COURTESY OF MELISSA MOHALLEY

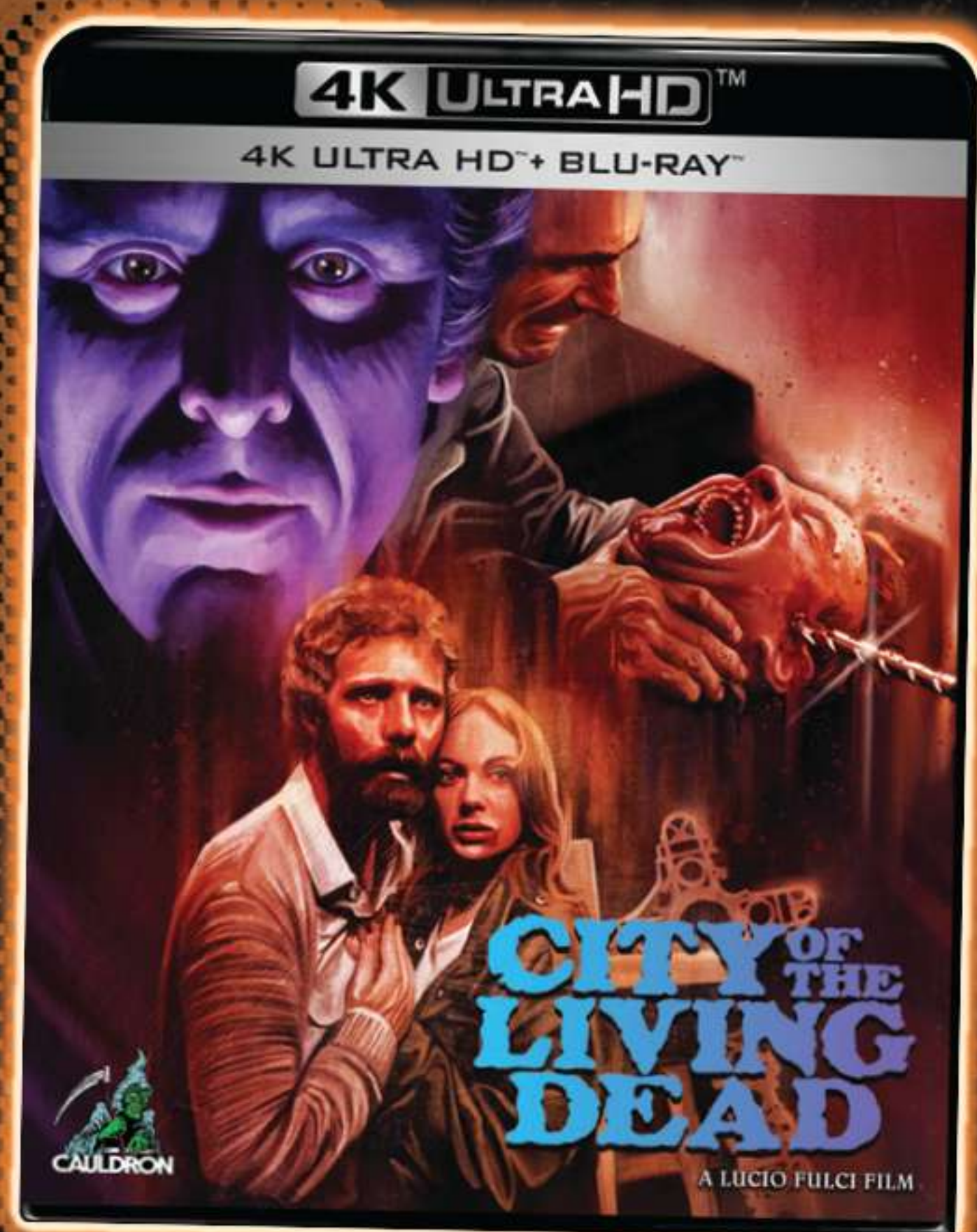
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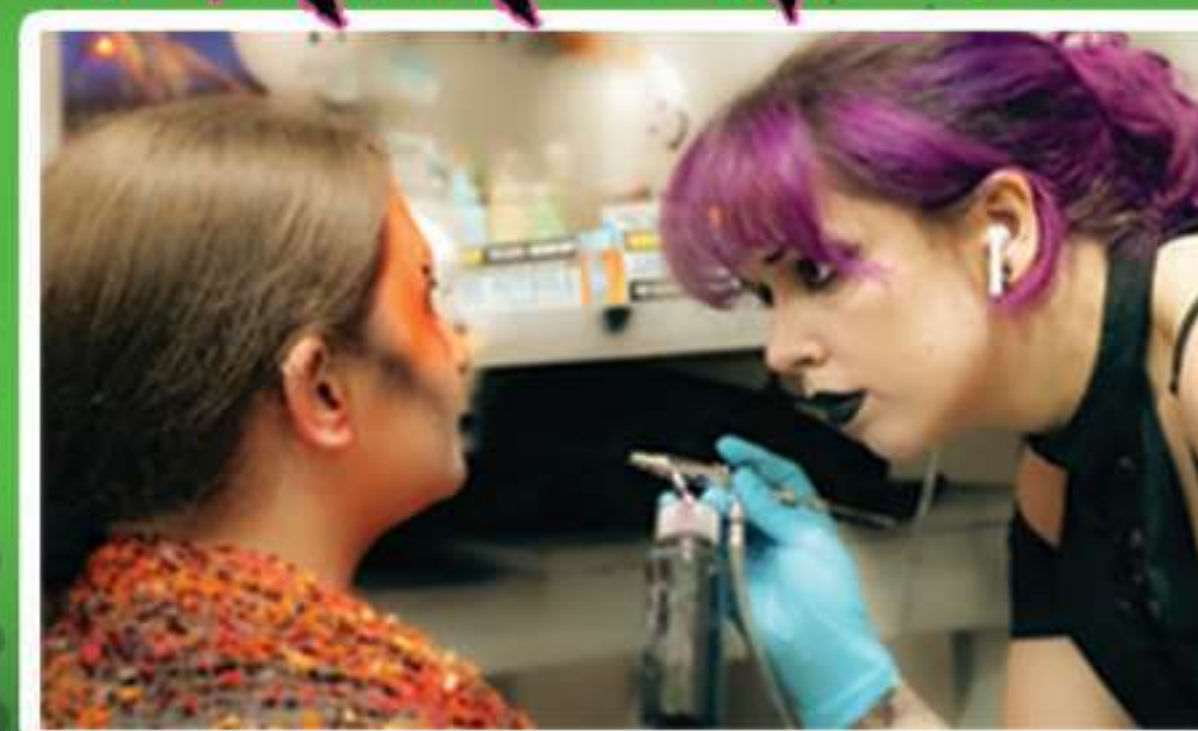
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Heidi Honeycutt SPITS ON YOUR CELLULOID

By Jenika McCrayer

The filmmaker and writer discusses her new book about women in horror.

Heidi Honeycutt is a filmmaker (*Wretched*, *Etheria*, *Beyond the Dark*) and author of the upcoming book *I Spit On Your Celluloid*, a celebration of women horror filmmakers. Honeycutt spent two decades researching and interviewing hundreds of filmmakers for her passion project, which is available on August 8, 2024.



ABOVE: SARAH ROBINSON IN *THE LOVE WITCH*.
BELOW: CELESTE YARNALL IN *THE VELVET VAMPIRE*.

Why horror? Why do you choose this genre to tell stories?

I'm like you, I'm assuming, where it's a big part of just who you are. You can't really explain why, other than you just love horror movies. And I love the people: I love the writers, I love the artists, I love the filmmakers, I love the fans.

Horror is the only place I've ever found that connection with other people. I feel like the horror community is really supportive. Obviously there are always exceptions, but overall, for the twenty years that I've been in the horror community, I found that people are generally supportive and kind, and there's a genuine enthusiasm.

Do you feel like the horror community is inclusive and supportive of women's stories?

Honestly, I do. I feel like there used to be a lack of women holding important roles in horror.

I think the horror industry is sort of representative of the entire entertainment industry as a whole. So when you have a lack of representation overall, you will also have it in these sub areas as well. A lot of this book comes from stuff that I've learned in the last twenty years, and things have really changed.

I think everybody is sort of getting along in horror. I think we see a lot of cool new stories coming out that are appreciated by people who maybe would not have heard of those stories before because they just weren't being made. I think women are telling cool stories now, and I think everybody else is hearing them and appreciating them.

In your book, you also include films that were never finished or distributed. It's not something I've seen in other analyses of horror. What significance did these films have for you, and why did you want to include them?

Because otherwise, it's just a mystery! Sometimes a film doesn't get finished. Film preservation wasn't very good. Thankfully, the United States television was so robust. Some stuff is lost, but from other countries, especially from Argentina and Mexico.

Were those films difficult to find?

There's nothing to find unless somebody's grandfather has it buried in their basement and nobody knows. I think more and more film restoration will be happening as people find more of this stuff. It's like finding treasure, you know?

Do you think we'll find more women filmmakers once we recover more lost films?

I think it's hopeful! I did find two films that were thought lost because no one had heard of seeing them since they aired. They're from the seventies by a director named Astrid Frank. Astrid was an actress in what are called sex comedies. I hired a private investigator in London because I knew she lived there, and they found her.

There was *nothing* about her, like nothing on the internet. I contacted

this one woman, and it turned out [to be] her daughter. She was like, 'Oh, my God, I can't believe you're interested in talking to my mom about this.' We ended up digitizing her films, which she luckily still had. I was able to interview her and include her in the book. That felt like a really big achievement for me.

Did you expect your work to take you there? It sounds like half book-writing, half archivist.

I knew that it would be hard, for some of them. It's the ones that I think really need to be written about that are harder. That takes a lot more work and a lot more research. Ninety-nine percent of the time, you don't hear back or it's a 'no,' but every once in a while, you get that 'yes' and it's always worth it.

Do the filmmakers that you interviewed for the book view themselves as trailblazers, or were they politically motivated to do these films?

I think for the most part, they are just filmmakers and they wanted to make a certain type of movie. Sometimes certain stories feel political, you know, or sometimes they do have an agenda.

There's one I've discussed in the shorts section of my book that I love called *The Herd* by Melanie Light. It's a short film and a radical vegan film [about] women being treated the same way that female cattle are in the dairy.

It makes me think of the anthology that came out a couple of years ago after the Roe v. Wade decision, *Give Me an A*.

That movie got a lot of attention because of the political message, yet it's still an entertaining horror anthology. There's nothing wrong with putting politics in your story and being overt about it. It can work really well, depending on your skill as a filmmaker and a storyteller.

Gigi Saul Guerrero made *Culture Shock*, which is about a Mexican woman, who comes into the U.S. illegally and ends up working for a wealthy white woman played by Barbara Crampton. I highly recommend it to anybody who likes the



A SCENE FROM MELANIE LIGHT'S
SHORT FILM *THE HERD*.



ASTRID FRANK IN THE
JEALOUS MIRROR.

creepy, weird, sort of *Stepford Wives* style. I'm always fascinated by films that have that and *Get Out* influences.

Get Out really changed the game, and even though Jordan Peele is a male director, do you think Get Out influenced female horror filmmakers?

Oh, absolutely. I think since *Get Out* we've seen a couple features by Black women directors. Black women directors [are] making horror movies that very much have a narrative about being a Black woman.

Before *Get Out*, people weren't as happy to finance that. At the end of the day, the entertainment industry is about money and if someone thinks they can make money off what you're trying to make, they will fund it.

And I think people love cool stories. The more stories you have being told and told well, the richer the culture becomes, you know?

Did researching this book and talking to other women filmmakers influence your approach to filmmaking?

I actually have put together a docuseries based on my book [but] nobody wants to make it.

Did they mention why or give any notes?

I think a similar project is already being made.

Women have made so much progress; still, there are some instances where it's as if there can only be one.

That's what I was thinking, too. It's seen as just a little subcategory of horror, and that main horror is really for straight dudes, right? That's just how it is.

One of the reasons I really wanted to write this book was because I think it's a big shame that a lot of these women are not known by horror fans. I wanted to get those stories out there because I find them really fascinating, and I think other horror fans will, too. 🤩

This conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

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BY KATYN CORRIGAN

FEATS OF CLAY

PART
ONE

SCULPTING IS A
CRUCIAL SKILL
BEHIND SOME OF
YOUR FAVORITE
CREATURE FX,
BUT IT'S OFTEN
OVERLOOKED.
NOT ANYMORE.

Stationed in stuffy shops, working long hours over lonely weekends, sculptors aren't typically the ones snapped in snazzy BTS set photos. They're in the trenches, using calloused thumbs to carve warmed earth into living visions. They are the unsung heroes of the practical effects world, and any fan of monster movies should know their names and be grateful for their contributions.

I was fortunate enough to speak with a few of these effects masters, and they told me their favorite piece that they've ever sculpted.



THE LAST OF US (2023)

Infected Utility Body, Colin Jackman

We had such a tight deadline, which meant it was a quick, physical sculpt that I could really throw myself into. It could be quite gestural due to the nature of fungi, and we could give it a bit more life. I used Plastiline grade 50. I mainly used my hands, scooping out the melted Plastiline and blobbing it on to create fairly impressionistic forms and shadows. Then a quick bit of finessing with a wire loop tool before using a gas burner to melt the surface for a slimy finish.



GHOSTBUSTERS (1984)

Slimer, Steve Johnson

I wanted this to be like a Tex Avery character, deforming and changing shape when it smiled. I used WED clay. I feel like getting out of my head and into the clay, it needs to be a very organic, very quick process. I've learned from people like H.R. Giger and Clive Barker that the quicker you get an idea out of your head, the closer it's going to be to your original idea. And so, I really like water clay, I like the fluidity of it coming out of my brain, through the wires of my arms into my hands, and just having things happen. It's almost like magic.

PHOTOS: THE LAST OF US BY BARRIE GOWER, GHOSTBUSTERS BY VIRGIL MORENO



V/H/S/94 (2021)

Raatma, Patrick Magee

I sculpted this piece during COVID lockdown in about four days. We had a turnaround of about fifteen days to go from concept to sculpture to creature suit, complete with a functioning jaw, hair and tubes rigged to drip black goo. I sculpted the creature suit on a fiberglass mannequin using WED clay. Overall, the creature has a smooth, human-like texture, so there was a lot of brushing it out with water, to smooth out harsh tool marks. Final texture was done using texture stamps, primarily made from orange peel textures. Once the suit was complete, and paint was dry, we fit the suit on a shop crew member and did a zoom with the on-set effects team showing them how to get the talent dressed, reviewed the prosthetic elements and gag effects, packed it up and shipped it from Los Angeles to Toronto.



creepshow (1982)

Fluffy, Tom Savini

The script simply said, 'We see a blur of fur and teeth.' That was it! So I asked a bunch of my artist friends to draw what they thought the crate creature should look like – Phil Wilson, Rick Catizone, some others – and I did my drawing. Their sketches were like insects, or big-headed alien creatures. I was always thinking of the Tasmanian Devil. We gave all the drawings to King and Romero, and they picked one of my sketches. If I had to do it again, I would've made him skinnier, because he's in the crate for a hundred years in the Antarctic, you know? I don't think he'd be as plump as I made him. I had never done an animatronic creature before, that was my first one. I owe Rob Bottin so much for teaching me how. He took me to his house and he tore the skins off the mechanical heads from *The Howling* to show me exactly how to do it.



creepshow HOLIDAY SPECIAL: SHAPESHIFTERS ANONYMOUS (2020)

Fluffy, Mikey Rotella

Greg Nicotero art directed this piece, so myself and designer Mike Broom worked closely with him to conceptualize the look. It's always a collaboration, so I tweaked the sculpture according to Greg's notes until we got something fresh and ferocious that still paid tribute to Fluffy. This took about two weeks to sculpt, from building the armature to sending to mold. I did a small maquette, and Broom did some awesome designs. Then we worked the rest out in the full-size sculpture, which was huge, about three times the size of the original Fluffy head. First I built the armature from aluminum speed rail, wood and chicken wire. Then sculpted the piece with WED Clay from Laguna Clay. I use tons of different tools, most handmade, but I love Ken's Tools, Kemper tools and Old Monstrosity Shop UK. I'm especially pumped about this piece because I'm a huge fan of *Creepshow* and Savini.



The BLOB (1988)

Little Eddie, Chet Zar

I was eighteen or nineteen years old. It was my first big effect that I got to be in charge of from start to finish. I liked the design and paint job, but the thing I really thought was cool about it was a technical issue that nobody else would really think about. The design element of Little Eddie's jaw drooping down exposed the chin of the actor, Bobby Porter. It was a full-head foam latex mask with a gaping mouth, with Bobby's actual chin sticking out right below the upper lip of the foam mask. I sculpted a gross, melted tongue that fit right over the actor's actual chin so there was nothing to hide, and it looked really natural. Below the tongue was an inner mouth sculpted over Bobby's neck and it looked great.



Army of Darkness (1992)

Evil Ash, Bruce Fuller

I was working at Tony Gardner's Alterian Studios. We were all thrilled to learn that the studio's next project would be *Evil Dead 3*. I was beside myself to have Tony assign me the task of designing/sculpting Evil Ash. Tony had a request that I incorporate a massive underbite into the design, which then became a sort of parody of Bruce Campbell's famous chin. It was my idea to have a rope around his head to hold his lower jaw on. I was a huge fan of Marley's ghost in a version of *A Christmas Carol* wherein he takes the sling off his head and his jaw drops open wide. The rough sculpt was cut into smaller, easier to apply pieces, then the finishing and detailing was done. It stayed pliable for weeks if needed, but we didn't need to worry about that – it was full steam ahead. Easily the quickest and easiest design phase I've ever been through.



Godzilla: King of the Monsters (2019)

Rodan Maquette, Tim Martin

I thought, 'If this was Rodan, and he comes out of a volcano, maybe his skin would be like the surface of a lava flow, where it's black, but cracked, and the outside glows.' Michael Dougherty and the writer looked at each other and said, 'That's what's in our script!' So it just kind of came together. The cool thing about going to that production meeting was that all of the other characters, Godzilla, Mothra, King Ghidorah, were all 100% ZBrush designs, all digital. And to the left, in the room, were about twenty different printed photos of my clay maquette. Also, when you're a fan of something, you know it and you put your best work into it. As an artist, it's really hard to be a gun for hire, especially if it's something that you just do not like. For something like *Godzilla*, I really was such a huge fan as a kid, I just poured all of my energy and love into it.





Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice (2016)

Crypt Creature, Steve Wang

It was a collaboration with creature designer Patrick Tatopoulos. We had six weeks to create the creature. There were three sculptors including myself, Miyo Nakamura and Brian Wade. We used a variety of Kemper tools and self-made tools. Chavant NSP medium brown clay was used. I was the supervising art director of this creature, so I was involved with every aspect of this process. It was a labor of love and a lot of effort was put into it to make it as creepy and fantastic as we could. It was featured very quickly in the film. Don't blink!



The Green Knight (2021)

The Green Knight Concept Bust, Barrie Gower

This sculpture was among several other pieces that were for concept purposes only, to help drive conversations with the director and get us the feedback required to sculpt the hero prosthetic makeup for Ralph Ineson. My sculptures are usually of finished prosthetic makeups sculpted over lifecasts of actors. I rarely have the opportunity to block out concept pieces, especially something that is fairly loose and all about flow and forms. I really enjoyed sculpting this piece as I drew from a wide range of references, from classical portrait sculpture, to fascinating panels of driftwood and organic tree formations.



Interview with the Vampire (1994)

Lestat, Miles Teves

The sculpture was based on a piece of concept art I created for this effect sequence. I had to resculpt this head later from scratch onto a proper molding armature created for this sequence of heads. Working into a clay pour-up of Tom Cruise's lifecast, then carefully inserting into it fake eyes and pre-sculpted acrylic teeth, it took me about three days to sculpt this piece. There were no iterations of this particular design as it was approved right away. However, there were three other previous stages sculpted for this practical/digital hybrid effects sequence that were created afterwards. I have a fondness for this piece because it turned out well, maintains something of the likeness of Cruise, possesses a lifelike expression of some sort, and seems to have struck a chord amongst fans and collectors.



PSYCHO GOREMAN (2020)

Psycho Goreman, Steven Kostanski

Whatever it is I'm making, if I scaled it down to action figure size, and put it on a shelf somewhere at a toy store, would it catch my eye? Would I be drawn to it? Would I want to get it? Because that was always my attitude as a kid, when I'd go looking for new toys, which one had a distinct look that's catching my eye, pulling me in. I do that with my creature design as well. Can it be distilled down to its most simple properties and still be engaging and still make me want it? The pink glowing cracks is such a '90s toy nonsense thing, too, that I would've gravitated towards. It was Monster Clay medium that I used for it. It's a pretty important piece, and I'm just proud of the fact that I took the extra time to try and sculpt him so that he has the kind of presence that I wanted him to have.



THE BOYS (2019)

Queen Maeve Costume, Saeko Yamazaki

It took about two weeks to sculpt. At the beginning, there was no design clearly. I needed to design and sculpt at the same time, so it took a longer time. There were multiple iterations! I used a rake tool, twisted wire tools and MONU-MELT hard clay. It was created in 2017 at Creative Character Engineering – Andrew Clement's shop.



FROM BEYOND (1986)

Pretorius Creature, Mark Shostrom

The large creature body took close to a week. Aside from myself, I had Bob Kurtzman, Greg Punchatz and Aaron Sims working with me on it. We used traditional sculpting tools, plus some odd items one wouldn't normally consider for sculpting: cut down plastic knives and tongue depressors for large forms and wrinkles, plus plastic window screening for smoothing the clay. It was an unusual design and a really ambitious one to pull off, especially considering the budget and time parameters I had. The bizarre look I came up with was a last-ditch effort to sway Stuart away from wild production illustrations people were doing for him. Cool drawings, but unfortunately those artists had no experience in FX. I would actually have to build the damn thing and make it function, so I designed Pretorius to accommodate Stuart's imagination and needs as well as my own. I didn't realize it at the time, but I was developing a design style which earned me a unique title. Whilst working on *Dick Tracy*, John Caglione asked me to design Little Face and said with a smile, 'Because you're the master of twisted flesh.' 🧟

These quotes have been edited for length and clarity. The conversation continues in the next issue with artists from Hellboy, From Dusk Till Dawn, Tales From the Darkside and more chiming in!



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CAVENTS & CURIOSITIES

Carolyn Bracken On
Damian Mc Carthy's

ODDITY

By Amber T

The star of the Irish paranormal film discusses
twin terror and macabre mannequins.

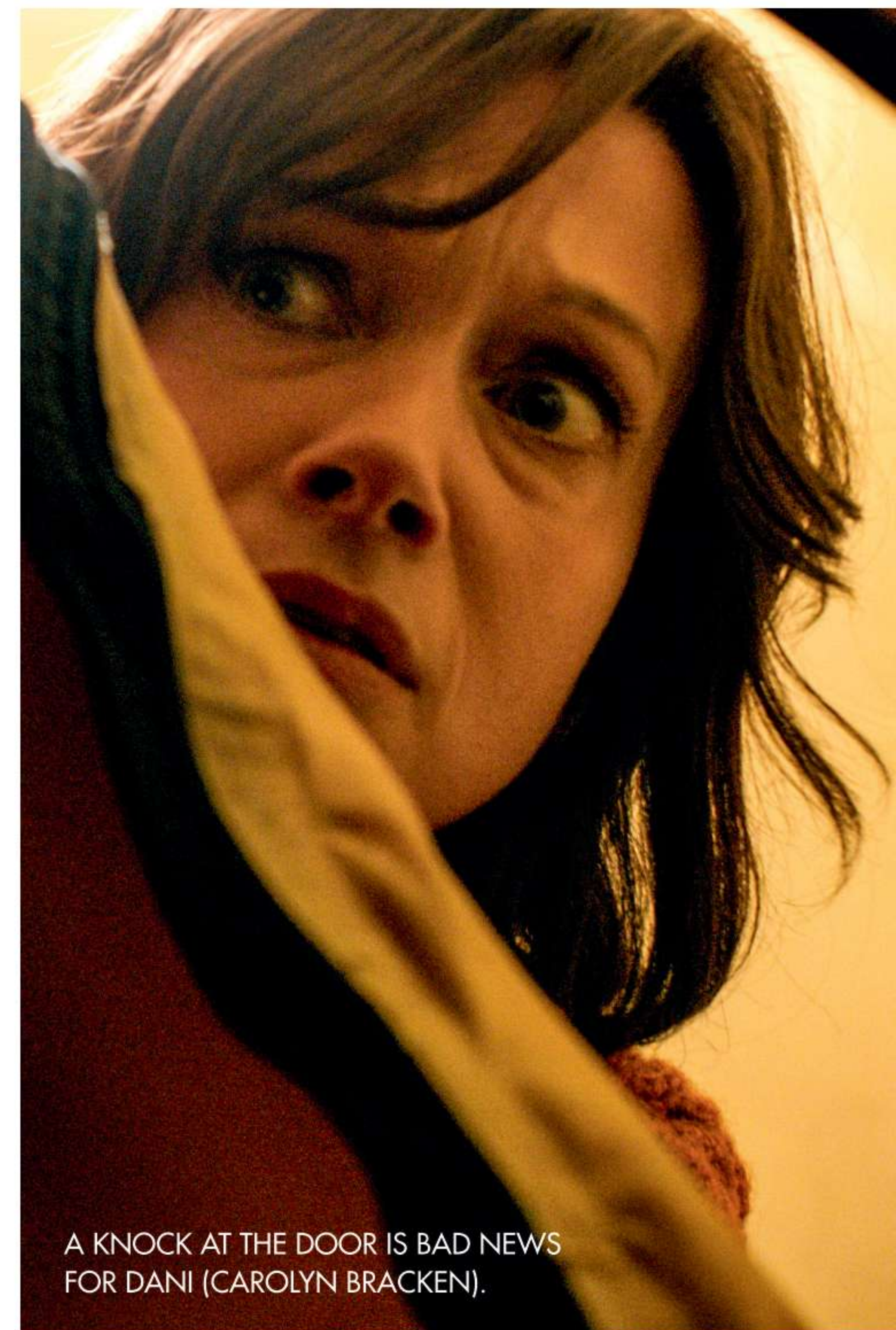


In 2020, Irish filmmaker Damian Mc Carthy ruined rabbits forever with his skin-crawling debut *Caveat*. Luckily, the central object of his sophomore feature *Oddity* is something most audiences are less likely to stumble across during a thrifting session, but it remains no less terrifying: a life-sized wooden mannequin, marred by a twisted, Edvard Munch-esque perma-scream. With this frightening figure at its center, *Oddity* evolves into an unbearably tense blend of genres: ghost story, murder mystery and pitch-black comedy. All elements align to deliver a macabre tale of curiosity cabinets, cursed objects and sisterly vengeance that'd make Poe proud.

Star Carolyn Bracken (*You Are Not My Mother*, *The Quiet Girl*) elevates *Oddity* in the dual role of twin sisters Dani and Darcy. A year after Dani is brutally murdered, blind psychic Darcy returns to the home now occupied by Dani's widower Ted (Gwilym Lee) and his new girlfriend Yana (Caroline Menton), hoping to discover the truth of the circumstances surrounding her

sister's death, with that uncanny mannequin helping in unexpected ways.

Ahead of *Oddity*'s September Shudder release, FANGORIA sat down with Bracken to pick her brains on the Irish horror renaissance, what it was like doing double duty on roles, and how it felt acting alongside the scariest prop of the year.



A KNOCK AT THE DOOR IS BAD NEWS FOR DANI (CAROLYN BRACKEN).



"OH, YOU SHOULDN'T HAVE. REALLY." DARCY (CAROLYN BRACKEN) HAS A HORRIFYING HOUSEWARMING GIFT FOR YANA (CAROLINE MENTON).

Carolyn, I never have nightmares, but you've given me two now with *You Are Not My Mother* and *Oddity*, so thanks for that. What drew you to *Oddity* in the first place?

You're welcome. The opportunity to take on the challenge to play two people within the one role was quite enticing. It was such a cool premise, and I do really enjoy the horror.

You spend more time in the character of Darcy, but your time as Dani is so

intense, including that opening scene which will stop me from ever answering my front door again. Which of the pair was more of a challenge to play?

With Darcy, there was more time to be able to flesh her out and focus on her story, but with Dani there was only a little time. With Darcy there was the challenge of exploring her and creating a fairly authentic woman, but with Dani there was the minimal amount of time to actually make her an authentic woman, too, and to be able to create

the similarities between the pair within a very short space of time. Then there were other challenges with playing Darcy, who is visually impaired, and making that look legitimate.

Darcy's blindness plays a pivotal role in the plot. What steps did you take to achieve such a realistic depiction of a person with a disability like that?

I had some of my own personal experience – I used to be a social care worker, and I did work with people who

DARCY: BLIND, PSYCHIC,
AND PISSED OFF.



were visually impaired. Sometimes, you don't know if somebody is blind, so you don't need to make it very obvious. I wanted to be sensitive to that. And it depends where Darcy is; when she's in her shop, which is her home, her movements and actions are going to be more fluid and comfortable. But in the house that she's not familiar with, her standing, her grounding, her need for assistance – whether it is legitimate or not! – is going to be a little different. It was trying to contextualize it within the environment she was in. And again, just being sensitive with it.

There's an uncanniness to your performance in *Oddity* that I also noticed in *You Are Not My Mother*; in both instances you play women who occupy this space between reality and the supernatural, and the audience

is unsure exactly where they stand with you as a character. Would you say you're drawn to those types of roles subconsciously?

Yes. [laughs] I don't think it's subconscious! I'm really drawn to characters that you can't quite put your finger on. It's that liminal space where you could either call them extremely odd or extremely interesting. I find that compelling because they can't really be categorized, and as a performer you're not going to put them in a box – anything goes. I like the reception that has, too; I feel it's connective to an audience when people know that there's heart in there but they can't settle fully on who they are.

As children when we're taught about Irish folklore, it's not happy, frolicking stories – they're quite frightening.”

- Carolyn Bracken

Let's talk about the film's leading man, the *Oddity* himself. What was it like acting alongside that... thing?

When performing as Dani, the wooden man wasn't around – he was hidden off in the corner. I only saw him when I was in Darcy mode, and Darcy has this odd, unusual connection to this

THE ODDITY FILMMAKERS WANTED TO ASSURE YOU THEIR FILM ISN'T SOME DRY MOOD PIECE SO, UH, HERE YOU GO.





wooden man. So while the initial reaction to him was a bit ‘...oh my god,’ because there’s a joining of the two, and Darcy kind of needs him in a lot of ways, this eternal terrifying scream that he’s caught in and that unsettling feeling dissipated quite quickly. As Darcy, there’s a warmth there. A creepy, unsettling warmth. So yeah, we liked him! He was just sitting there at the table a lot of the time as we all motored around. It was nice having him around.

Does he have a name?

We were asked this at SXSW [where *Oddity* premiered] and we actually didn’t give him a name! It was just Wooden Man. We all got so used to him and he was such a lovely – well, not lovely – presence on the set. I kind of feel bad that we didn’t give him a name.

There’s been an Irish horror renaissance over the last few years:

Caveat, and Kate Dolan’s *You Are Not My Mother* as we spoke about earlier, filmmakers like Neasa Hardiman and Aislinn Clarke, you’ve also got Lee Cronin killing it with *Evil Dead Rise* and, more recently, Paul Duane’s

All You Need is Death. What do you think makes Irish horror so special?

I think our connection to that thin veil between life and death is still quite strong in our country. I think the Irish are very, very good storytellers, and the content of the stories is very rich. That mixed with fear is very interesting. I wonder if it’s the combination of deep, soulful storytelling mixed with the joy of horror that might have something to do with it. What do you think?

Totally agree. That veil, as you mentioned, feels very important in Irish culture and history, with Samhain for example. Lots of very dark folklore, too: fairies, changelings, banshees, that sort of thing.

As children when we’re taught about Irish folklore, it’s not happy, frolicking stories – they’re quite frightening. Our history is quite dark in places, so we have that running through us.

I think it’s a sort of cleansing that Irish writers and directors are able to put that to screen very effectively and audiences are drawn to it.

Would you like to stay working in the horror genre?

I’d love to do more horror. There’s often a fear of being typecast but I don’t care. I really enjoy playing those women that have this uncanny valley feeling to them. And horror sets are very fun to be on!

With screaming wooden men everywhere.

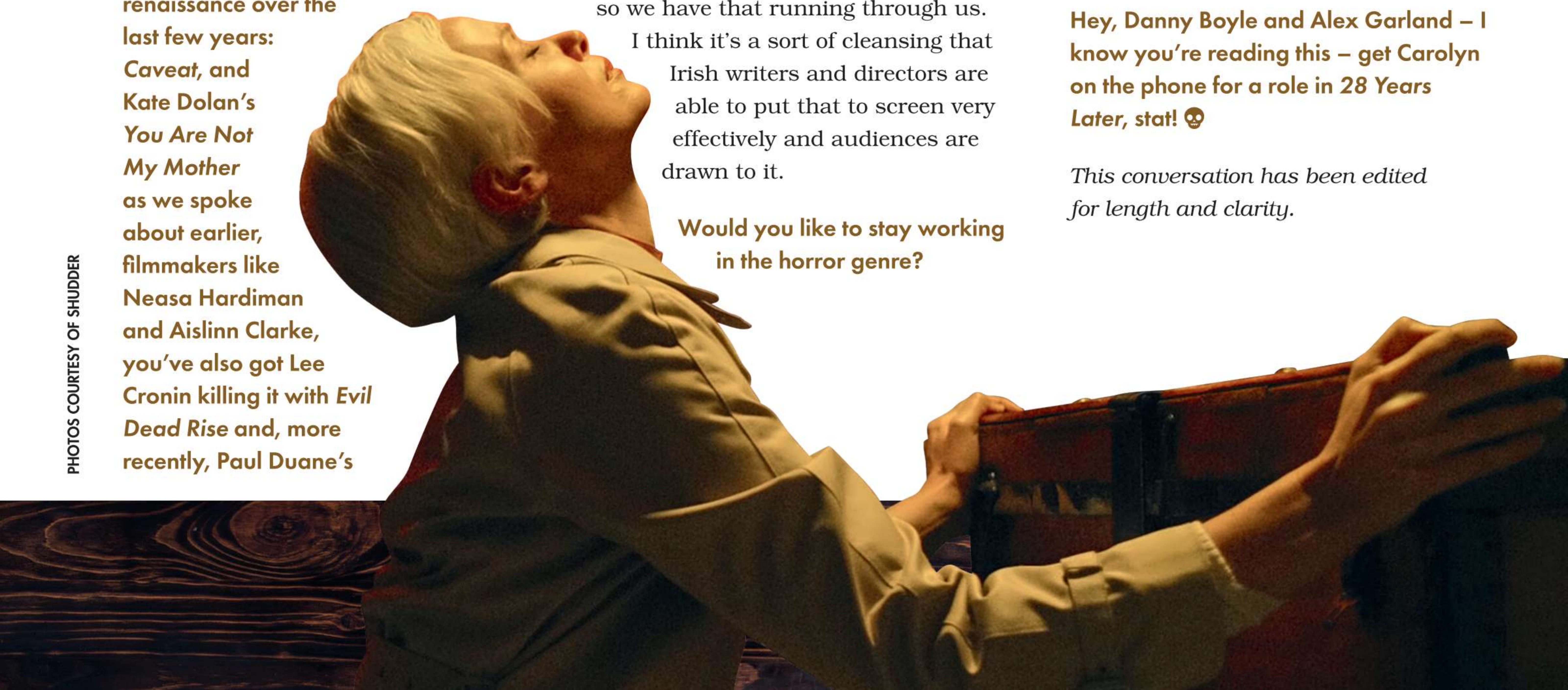
Exactly! There’s blood everywhere, prosthetics, and then in the makeup department there’s all these pictures of gore and broken ankles... it’s great. It’s a lovely environment to be in.

You’ve been in two slow-burn, folky horrors now – might we see you in something more fast-paced in the future?

Oh, the idea of any fast-paced movie like *28 Days Later*... that would be a dream, so it would. Being chased by zombies – an absolute dream.

Hey, Danny Boyle and Alex Garland – I know you’re reading this – get Carolyn on the phone for a role in *28 Years Later*, stat! 📞

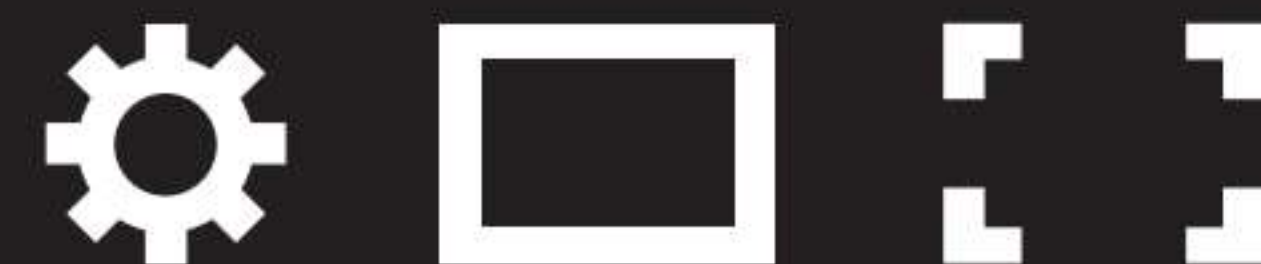
This conversation has been edited for length and clarity.



THE MORTIFYING ORDEAL OF BEING KNOWN

BY RS BENEDICT

HORROR IN THE INFLUENCER AGE.

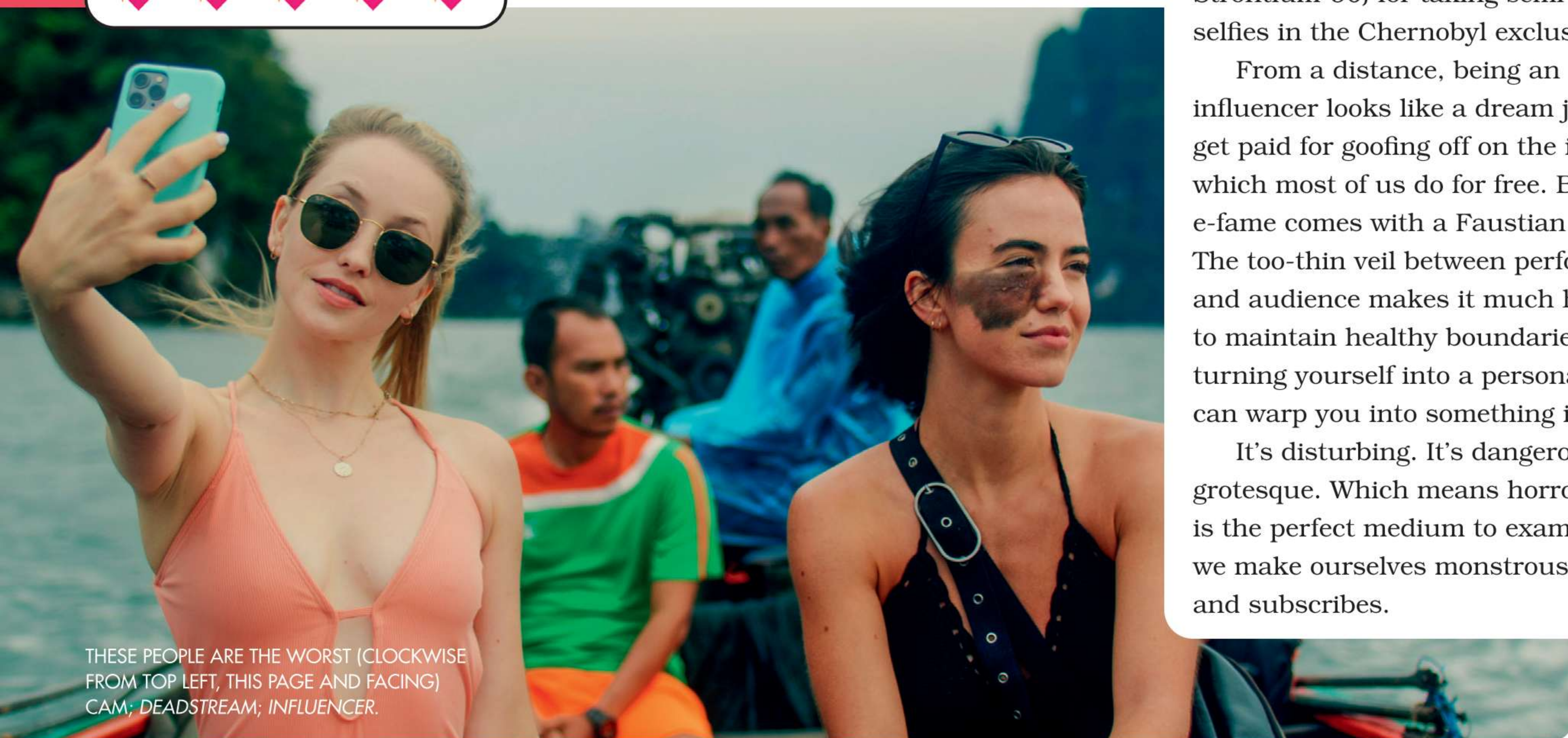


I used to think horror movie characters were impossibly stupid. Who would be dumb enough to go camping at Crystal Lake after all those murders? What kind of idiot would open a demonic puzzle box just to get laid? But now, thanks to influencers, I know better. Every day, we see real-life social media stars do things that

would get you killed in a horror movie. There's the guy who got in trouble for messing with a corpse in the infamous Japanese suicide forest. There's the prank streamer who got shot in a mall for bothering a stranger in an Open Carry state. And then there's a staggering number of Insta hotties who caught flak (and significant doses of Strontium-90) for taking semi-nude selfies in the Chernobyl exclusion zone.

From a distance, being an influencer looks like a dream job. You get paid for goofing off on the internet, which most of us do for free. But e-fame comes with a Faustian contract. The too-thin veil between performer and audience makes it much harder to maintain healthy boundaries, and turning yourself into a personal brand can warp you into something inhuman.

It's disturbing. It's dangerous. It's grotesque. Which means horror cinema is the perfect medium to examine how we make ourselves monstrous for likes and subscribes.



THESE PEOPLE ARE THE WORST (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT, THIS PAGE AND FACING) CAM; DEADSTREAM; INFLUENCER.



In horror films, malicious manifestations of the supernatural often come with rules, and the hero can win – or at least survive – by learning them. Shoot the werewolf with a silver bullet; expose the vampire to sunlight; solve the Lament Configuration and send the Cenobites back to Hell. Cosmic horror protagonists aren't so lucky. The forces they face are incomprehensible, indifferent.

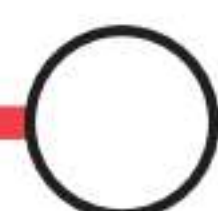
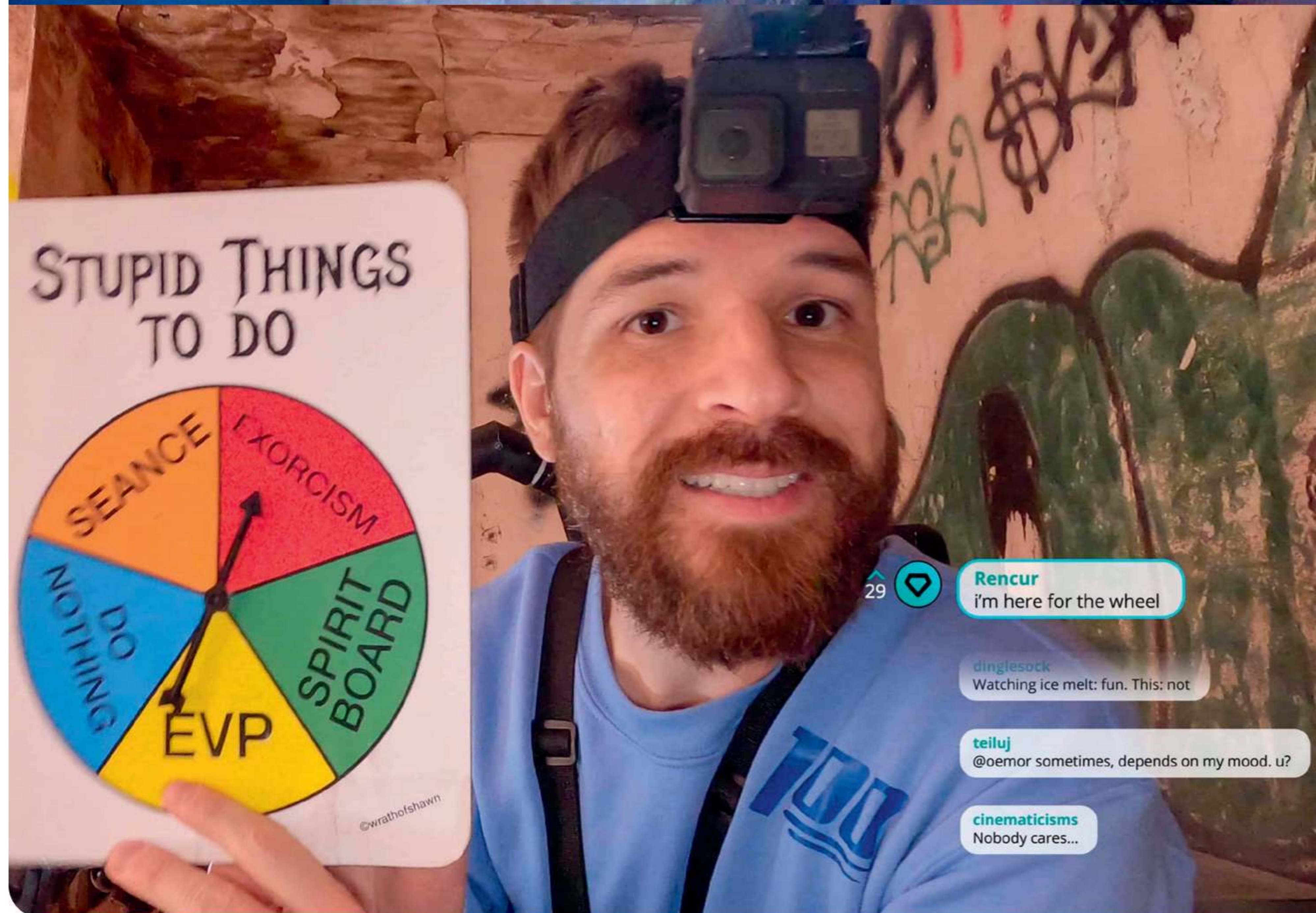
An influencer's career is subject to similarly malign powers. The platforms they depend on promote certain kinds of content and hide others. To succeed, an influencer must figure out how to give the Algorithm what it wants, like supplicants to a cruel, capricious god. But the rules are often unwritten. The website formerly known as Twitter was found to amplify posts by right-leaning political figures. TikTok got caught suppressing videos by poor and unattractive creators. These platforms do not publicly advertise their biases; it took research to scry them out.

The Algorithm doesn't want what's best for us. Social media sites often reward antisocial attitudes and self-destructive behaviors. Hateful or extreme content drives engagement, which gets more attention. And it's a fickle god; it frequently changes without warning. Facebook used to emphasize links to articles; now the social media site is dropping its news section.

Horror cinema recognizes all this and draws some not-too-subtle parallels to more traditional forces of darkness. In 2022's *Deadstream*, a recently canceled prank streamer films himself spending a night in a haunted house. While enduring a relentless assault by a legion of damned spirits, the dimwitted Shawn (Joseph Winter) must navigate the equally arcane rules of the cursed mansion alongside those of the streaming platform on which he makes his living. In the end, the house and the platform work much the same way. Both will punish you mercilessly for saying the wrong thing. Utter a cuss word and LivVid will hit you with a content strike, risking demonetization

or suspension. Recite a spooky Latin phrase from a cursed book and your soul is condemned to Hell for eternity.

In Daniel Goldhaber and Isa Mazzei's 2018 film *Cam*, up-and-coming camgirl Alice (Madeline Brewer) discovers something freakishly wrong with her FreeGirlsLive account. She appeals to the site's tech support, but that works about as well as begging Cthulhu for mercy. They can't help her; they won't help her, and they *won't* explain why. And she can't just start a new account on another service. It – whatever the uncanny digital entity is – lurks on all the cam sites, a perverted fan informs her. The Algorithm loves it. There is no escape.





(DON'T) LET ME IN



Horror thrives on violation. It revels in the crossing of boundaries: between life and death, material and spiritual, this world and the next. So do influencers.

Traditional media has a fourth wall to separate the performer from the audience. For influencers, the veil is much thinner. They talk to their followers in real time. They cultivate queasily intimate parasocial relationships with tens of thousands of lonely strangers glued to their screens. It's a dangerous dynamic for performer and audience alike, and it can lead to harassment, psychological abuse, manipulation, and violence in both directions.

In Rob Savage's 2021 film *Dashcam*, antivaxxer Annie (Annie Hardy) isn't so much an internet personality as she is a tulpa brought to life by a Breitbart comments section. She lives for her audience of reactionary trolls, composing freestyle raps from their rightwing rants. But their influence on her goes even further than that. As the movie goes on, the fans' constant chatter goads Annie into performing increasingly irresponsible acts. Take off your COVID mask. Stick your unwashed hand in someone else's food. Steal your friend's car. Confront the obviously possessed monster woman

in the forest. And though the chat is happy to invade Annie's privacy by listing her address, they never bother to send emergency services her way.

When it comes to setting boundaries with the audience, *Cam's* Alice balances on a razor's edge. Let them get too close, and you might end up with a stalker. Too distant, and you lose your livelihood. Every interaction with her clients is tinged with the unspoken threat of violation. They always want more from her, and her bubbly deflections don't always ward them off.

The threat of stalking looms in *Deadstream*, too, when an impish

fangirl (Melanie Stone) arrives uninvited to spend the night with her favorite e-celebrity. Shawn, alarmed by her presence, allows her to stay at the behest of his followers. And when things go horribly wrong, the chat rewards Shawn's self-sacrifice by making fun of him. But Shawn has always suffered for his audience. He got his followers via self-destructive stunts like going whitewater rafting in a bassinet or throwing himself into a garbage truck. Performing an unholy blood ritual is barely an escalation. If anything, it's the inevitable next step.



IMPOSTER SYNDROME



Compared to traditional celebrities who rely on an army of personal trainers, stylists, agents, managers, and publicists, influencers promise their followers authenticity. They do their own makeup. They speak without a script. They bring you into their homes and show you who they really are.

But that's not true either. Those spontaneous family vlogs are rehearsed and edited, the selfies are filtered and Photoshopped, and that casual athleisure outfit is part of a sponsorship deal (link in bio).

If anything, the effort to cultivate that artificial realness makes things worse. If you're selling your true self, then the very essence of who you are becomes a commodity for public consumption. Shaped by the demands of your followers, you turn into something you're not. An influencer has to live full-time with that uneasy tension between their true self and their personal brand. It can be a nightmare.

In *Cam*, a digital mimic takes over Alice's account and wreaks havoc on her personal life. In one of the creepiest scenes in the movie, Alice realizes that her biggest fan – a man who goes to extreme lengths just to be near her – prefers the imposter to the real thing. And while the real Alice falls apart, the fake one climbs to the top of the site ranking.



In the 2022 film *Influencer*, a lifestyle Instagrammer named Madison (Emily Tennant) has an unfortunate run-in with a con artist who steals her identity: her money, her home, her social media career, her image, even her boyfriend. Madison's glamorous online lifestyle has become so fake that it no longer needs Madison to maintain it. It is only by becoming very real, very offline, and very unphotogenic, that anyone can survive the violent pretender.

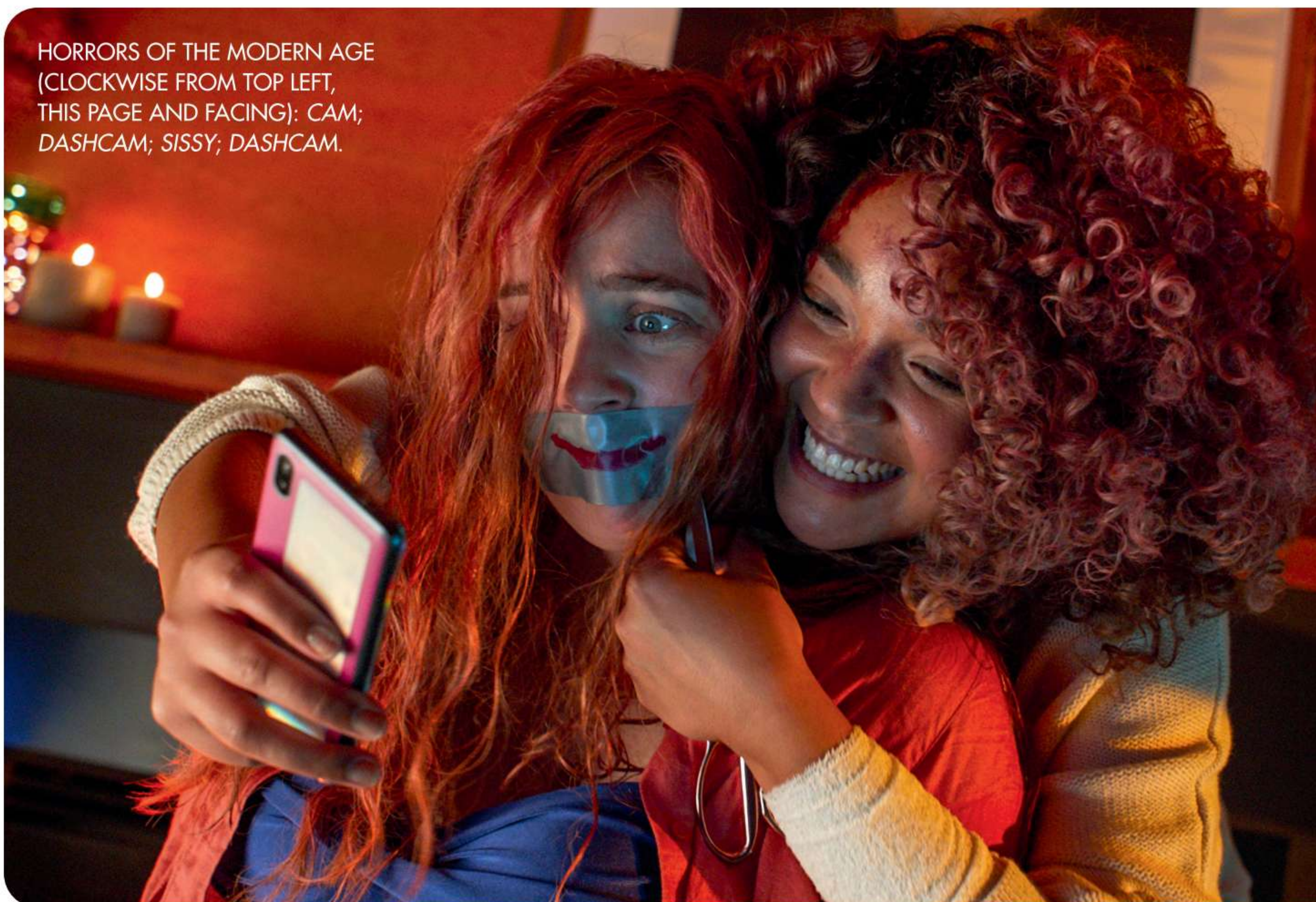
But some influencers prefer the charade to the messiness of their real lives. One of the biggest threats facing the phony priest (Ryan Guzman) in 2019's *The Cleansing Hour* is the truth. During a livestreamed exorcism that turns much too real, a demon holds Father Max's friends hostage and forces the celebrity clergyman to expose himself literally and figuratively. Max must strip off his store-bought vestments and confess his many sins.

In Hannah Barlow's 2022 film *Sissy*, Cecilia (Aisha Dee) lives the charmed life of an online mental health

guru, hawking gimmicky self-care products and questionable wellness advice to her adoring followers. A surprise encounter with her childhood best friend forces Cecilia to face an intolerable truth about herself. Maybe a woman who never formally studied counseling but who *did* stab another kid in the face with a garden trowel should not present herself as an expert in matters of the human psyche. (Those who can't do, teach. Those who can't teach, post.) That uncomfortable confrontation is bad enough, but when another woman threatens to tell Cecilia's followers the ugly truth about her, Cecilia goes on a gory rampage. She likes her fake self a lot more than the real one, and she's willing to kill for it.

It's easy to point and laugh at influencers. But they exist because our world has, inexplicably, carved out a niche for them. And we watch; whether out of love or hate or boredom, we watch. They could not exist without our gaze. Maybe that's the most horrific part: we made them, and we keep making them. What does that make us? 🧠

HORRORS OF THE MODERN AGE
(CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT,
THIS PAGE AND FACING): CAM;
DASHCAM; SISSY; DASHCAM.





MY

BOGLIN

ATE
YOUR

Barbie

BY REBEKAH
McKENDRY

A LOOK AT THE HORROR TOYS THAT MADE US.

For an 8-year-old girl in the late '80s to early '90s, few things were as important as Barbie: maintaining the proper dream house, making sure that Barbie's hair was perfect, and deciding whether she should wear her gymnast outfit or ball gown to the market today.

But then... there was another type of 8-year-old girl, the type that owned Boglins, My Pet Monster, Monsters in My Pocket, and Garbage Pail Kids. We were the weirdos, Mister. The ones that showed up at the sleepover with an *Alien* toy in tow (made by Kenner in the early '90s), ready to spread Xeno eggs throughout Barbie's garden party.

These horror gateway toys not only fueled my love of spooky content long before my parents would let me watch *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, but they also taught a lesson that horror fans hold dear: not all monsters are evil. Some might seem monstrous but turn out to be your best friends. And whereas that My Buddy doll scared the hell out of me (and was also the main influence for *Chucky*), I found the My Pet Monster doll to be endearing.

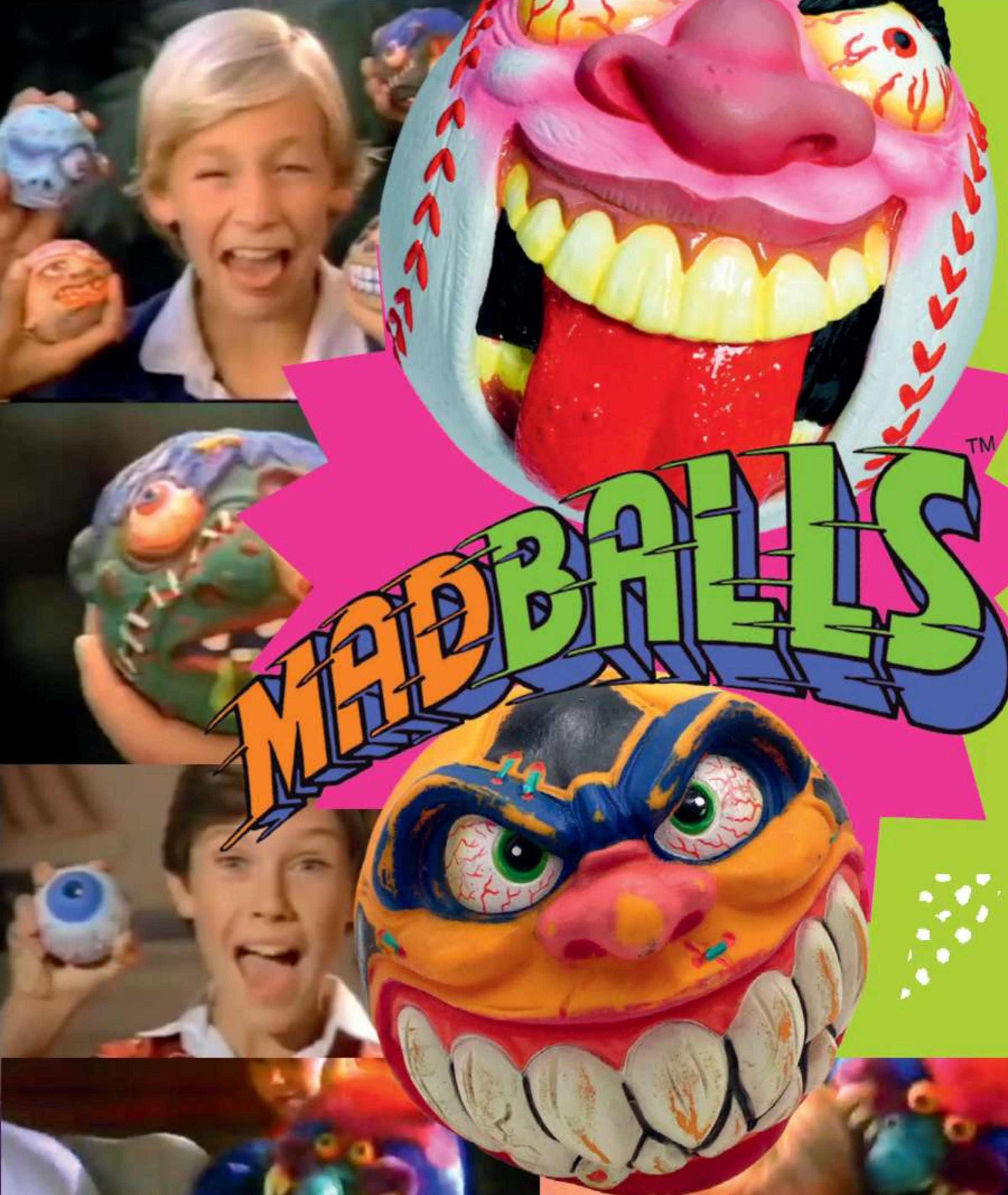
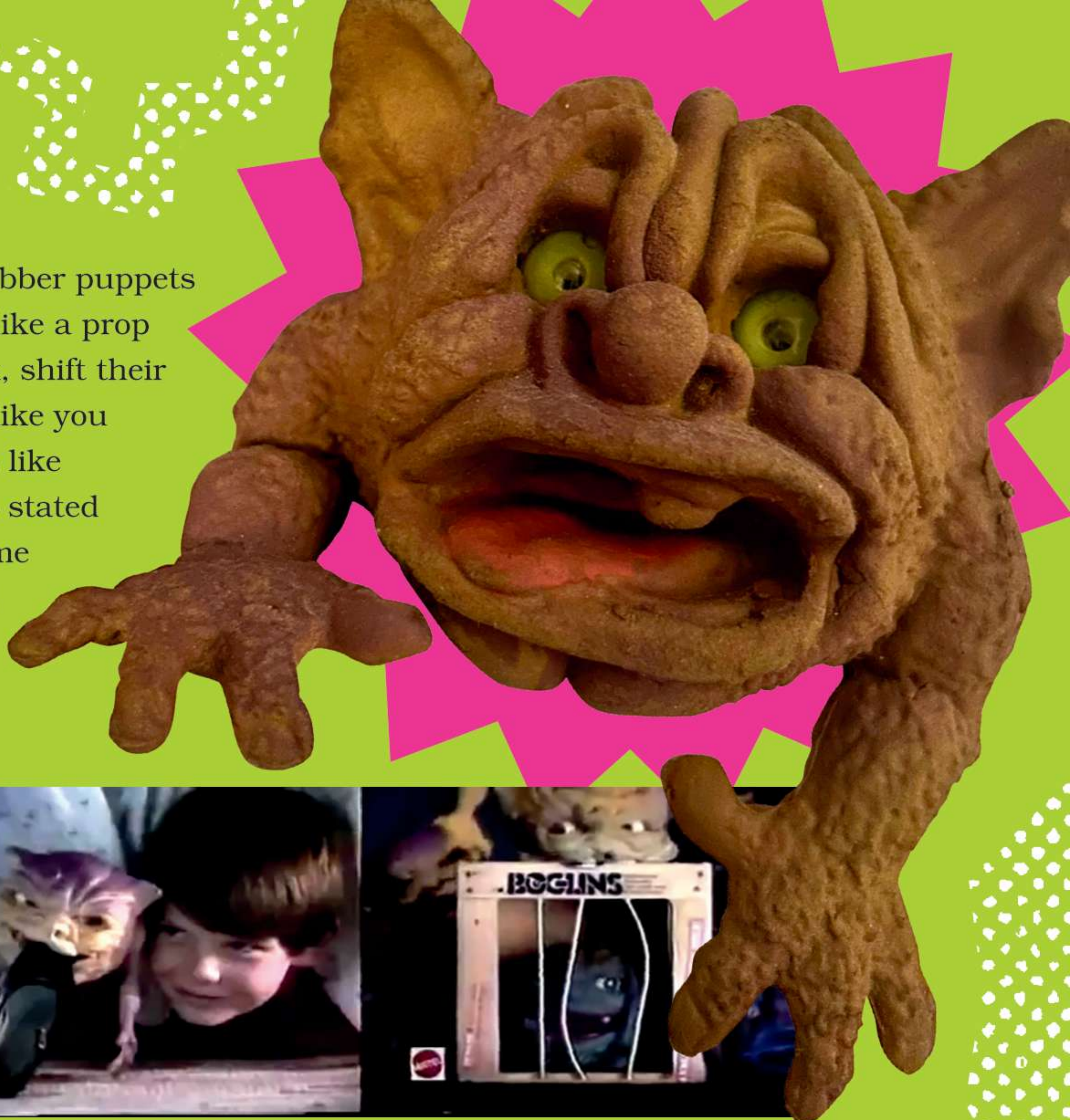
Now that I'm a parent who is frequently found in toy aisles, I wonder what was it about that time period that led to such a surplus of horror-fueled kids toys, and why are we not seeing the same trend now? I mean, kids still like spooky shit, right? Where are the monsters?

My best theoretical guess lies within our current media trend – largely the fact that we aren't seeing much gateway horror in media indicating to toy execs that kids want more spookiness. The late '80s and early '90s were rich with gateway horror movies, and Saturday morning TV was a bonkers collection of horror media. Some of the cartoons from this time include *Tales from the Crypt*, *Killer Tomatoes*, *Toxic Avenger*, *Beetlejuice* and *Swamp Thing*.

Many horror films and TV shows from this time became unintentionally coopted by kids. For instance, *Ghoulies* contained very adult themes including sex, Satan, and ample gore, but it also boasted rather cute goblin creatures who scampered around the house popping out of toilets. It's no coincidence that the popular Boglins toys look almost identical to the Ghoulies in the movie. So if we get more gateway horror in media showing a trend and buyer predilection, then we will get more gateway horror toys. Now, while all the screenwriters hopefully get to work on adolescent horror pitches, let's take a look back at some of the spooky toys that made us the proud horror adults we have become.

BOGLINS

There were few toys I loved as much as my Boglins. These rubber puppets looked and felt just like a movie prop. They also function much like a prop monster in that they could not only move around, but also blink, shift their eyes, and wiggle their tongues. Watching the commercial, it felt like you could literally own one of the small creatures from popular films like *Ghoulies*, *Critters* and *Gremlins*. The commercial for Boglins also stated they could be used for “scaring girls.” This was a marketing theme for many horror toys which only made weirdo girls like me want them more. I still have one of my Boglins today. Sponk has now been with me with me for over 35 years, and I still love this squishy lil guy!



Like Boglins, the commercial for Madballs was all about using the toys to freak out other kids, specifically girls. So of course I had to beg my parents to buy me every single one of the eight in the original line-up. My parents were not as enthused about overcoming sexism in the form of toy materialism as I was. But, over time, I acquired three of them: Slobulus (a monster with his eyeball hanging out), Aargh (a blue-skinned Frankenstein), and Oculus Orbus (an eyeball). These three chums came with me everywhere. I'd hide them around my room in hopes that my mom would pick up a pile of laundry and shriek as she found a grotesque Madball lurking underneath (it never worked). I brandished them on the playground hoping that the sight of an over-sized, nerf-like eyeball would send other kids running in fear (that didn't work, either). Then one summer Aargh was left in the backyard pool overnight, and the chlorine removed all of his gruesome paint. RIP, Aargh.

A few years after Madballs, toy makers released a line of Blurp Balls featuring the same concept of a ghastly ball head, but when you squeezed them, they would vomit a second ghastly head from their own mouths. These were fun until you eventually lost the small head and they lost their ability to blurp.



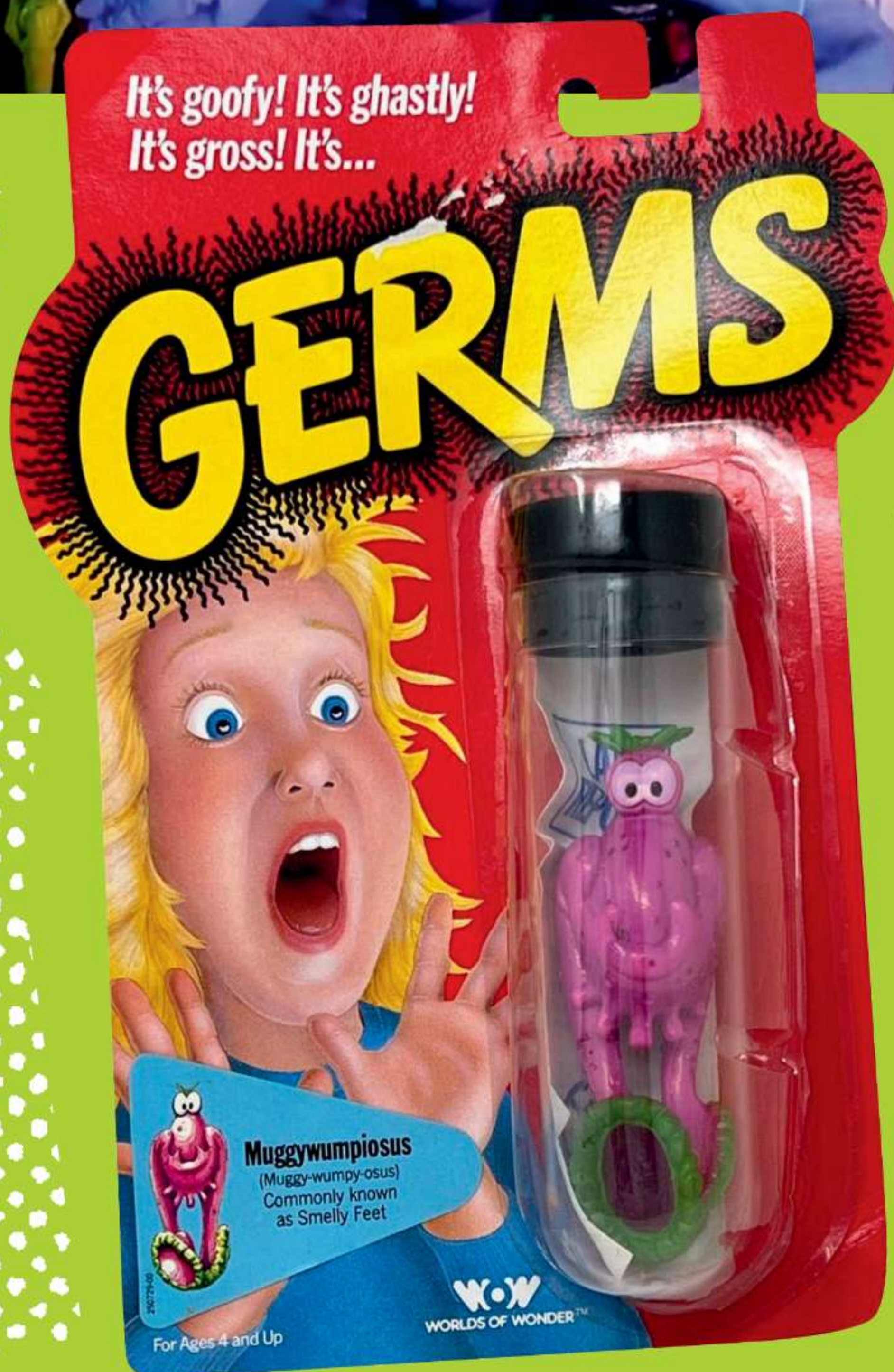
My PET MONSTER

Amtoy released My Pet Monster in 1986, along with a commercial again touting how he could scare other kids, but he would still always be your friend. And My Pet Monster was truly my friend. I was given a My Pet Monster for Christmas when I was 6, and he was one of my favorite stuffies. Yes, he had fangs and big eyes and a warty nose, but this guy understood my 7-year-old problems. He was eventually spun off into a movie and TV cartoon.



MONSTER FACE

Before my parents realized what a weird child I was, they bought me this disembodied Barbie head on a pink plastic pedestal, and you were supposed to style the disembodied Barbie head's hair. It was life-sized and looked like someone had lobbed off Barbie's upper torso and glued it to a slab of plastic. There she sat smiling, waiting for me to practice French braids on her luscious blonde locks. It was downright terrifying. While the Barbie head lived deep in my closet where she couldn't hurt anyone, I was totally jealous of kids who had Monster Face! Monster Face was the same basic concept – a disembodied head, but you got to stick things like bugs, slime, and stitches onto its skull. There was even a pulsating tumor that would leak green goo! Where I found the perma-smiling Barbie head to be terrifying – she was hiding so much pain behind those high cheek bones – the Monster Face just kicked ass.



Germers were a super obscure line of toys released in the late 1980s from Worlds of Wonder. I loved these little plastic scary dudes so much that I still have mine. Each germ was designed to be a gross body condition: stinky feet, burps, eyeball goo, belly button lint, and some bodily responses like giggles and hiccups. Ignoring the fact that belly button lint and hiccups are in no way caused by germs, each of these guys came in a test tube along with a "lab report" fact sheet about them. They still make me smile, which is the tell-tale sign of a good toy, no matter how horrific it may or may not be. 🦋

HONORABLE MENTION HORROR TOYS THAT DESERVE GOOGLING:

Creepy Crawlers, 1992

Stretch Screamers, early 2000s

Alien vs. Predator Action Figures, mid-'90s

Mighty Max, 1992

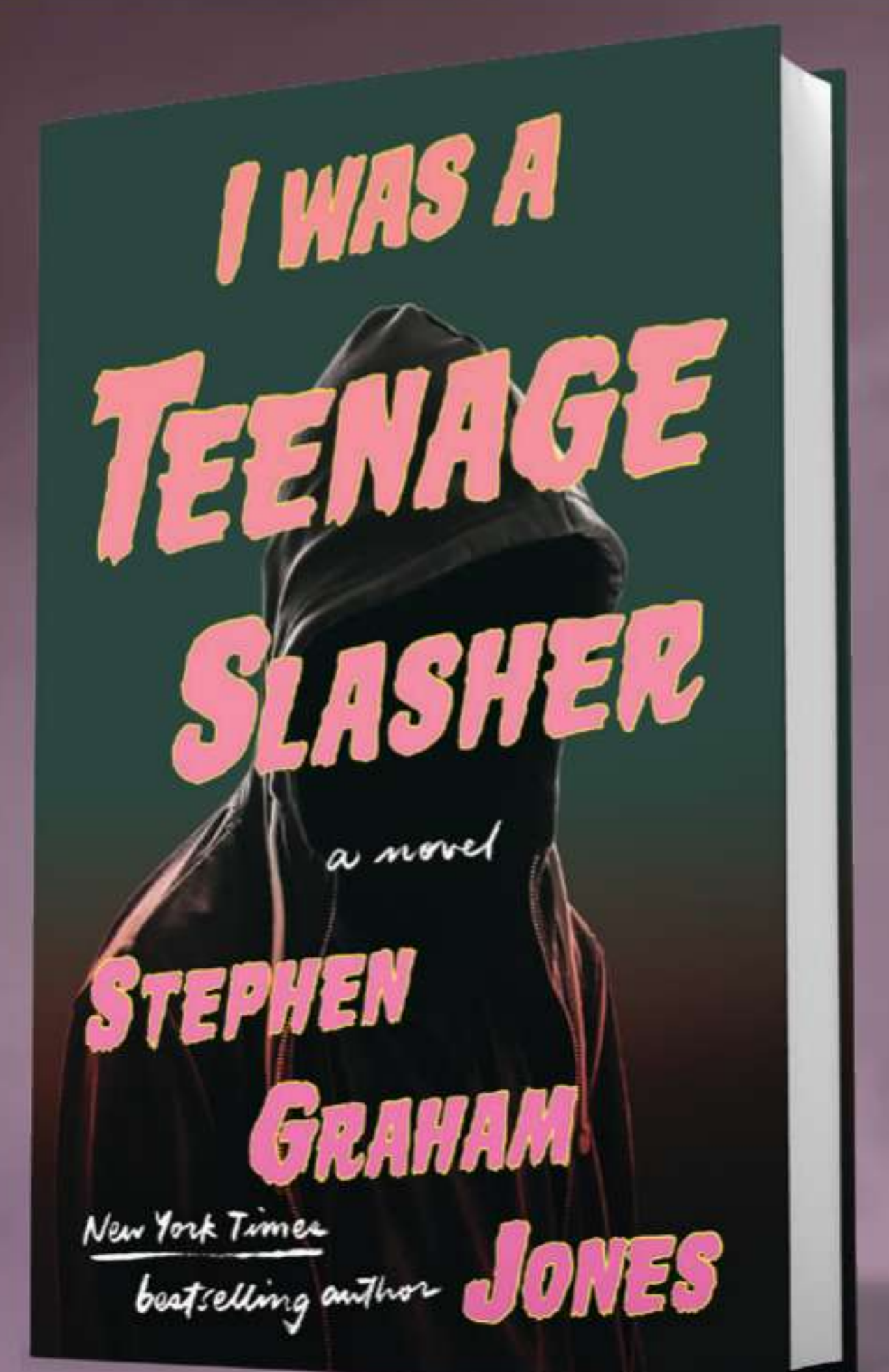
Monster in My Pocket, 1990



FROM THE MASTER OF HORROR STEPHEN GRAHAM JONES

West Texas. 1989. Carnage. Justice.
This summer, you will root for the killer.

SAGA
PRESS



By Ve Neill

BARRIE GOWER, THE LAST OF US

Our makeup effects field correspondent continues her conversation from Issue 23 with the award-winning makeup artist behind HBO's hit post-apocalyptic series.

LUCY PITTARD
IN A CLICKER
TEST MAKEUP.



In our last conversation, Barrie and I discussed his makeup effects work on such hits as *The Wolfman*, *Game of Thrones*, *Harry Potter*, *Stranger Things* and more. But Barrie has done such great and extensive work on *The Last of Us*, the HBO drama based on the post-apocalyptic video game series, that it warrants its own article.

"I was actually at the Emmys for *Game of Thrones* and *Chernobyl* when the writer/creator of *Chernobyl*, Craig Mazin, came to me and said I might have something in the pipeline that you may be interested in, so we should keep in touch," Barrie says. "It was about twelve months later that there was a press release saying that Craig was doing *The Last of Us*. So I thought, 'Ahh, now I know what he was talking about,' and I basically started stalking him."

Barrie was aware of writer Neil Druckmann's "hugely successful game" for Naughty Dog, and in particular the design of the creatures called clickers, the third stage of the infected (after runners and stalkers) that have split-open faces overrun with fungus and gaping mouths filled with jagged teeth. "I had seen the IP, the designs, and I remember thinking, 'Whoever got this gig, it would be a dream come true for a makeup FX company.' Doing these beautiful creatures is why I kind of

A CLICKER CLIQUE (L-R):
BARRIE GOWER, DUNCAN JARMAN,
OLIVIER ROSS-PARENT (AS THE CLICKER!),
VICTORIA BANCROFT-PERRY
AND SARAH GOWER.



chased it.” Luckily, that dream job went to Barrie and Sarah, his wife and co-founder of BGFX.

Druckmann and Mazin, the showrunners of HBO’s *The Last of Us*, told Barrie that they wanted to honor fan expectations from the video game but also wanted to give him room to evolve the designs with his own ideas. Barrie has worked very closely with both men to bring this epic fantasy pandemic drama to fruition. He was furnished with original artwork of the characters from the game so that the show can stay as true to the game as possible. They have, naturally, embellished the plots and character arcs to make them more interesting for a television show and to fully develop the characters. The writing and acting are phenomenal, not to mention the absolutely gorgeous makeups created by Barrie and his team. “We had incredible source material from the game and what these creatures looked like. There was some beautiful artwork that was done for the game which was given to us, as well.”

He continues, “We did some concept art with some UK-based artists for about three months. We kept going round and round in circles and found we would go back to the original designs because they were the strongest. We asked Neil to give us his greatest hits of character designs so we could use them as a springboard to develop more makeups, and we started sculpting makeups.”

The various levels of infection from the *Cordyceps* brain virus allow for a wide variety of makeup effects. Barrie says, “There were several stages ranging from simple veins to small mushrooms and eventually the very large mushroom head ones. It was a great combination

DUNCAN JARMAN (TOP),
COLIN JACKMAN (LEFT) AND
ANDY HUNT (RIGHT)
COLLABORATE ON A SCULPTURE.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF VE NEILL & BARRIE GOWER

JOEL HALL PAINTING
THE BLOATER SUIT.



of our designs and the originals, as well. We had a really great rapport with Craig and Neil, and we would all get very excited when we did the makeup tests. Everyone was incredibly enthusiastic about the project. Both Craig and Neil have a wonderful eye – when they would give the critiques of the makeups of what they liked and didn't like, they were always right. We really couldn't disagree with a lot of their judgments. One of things that was helpful was that someone put a five-hour video together of the game on YouTube, so Sarah and I watched it and that was pretty much the first season. *The Last of Us* is a true dream job.”

Barrie spoke to me about the different types of makeup and how he created foam and silicone pieces that they mix and match. Obviously, there is a weight issue with silicone, so the larger pieces and body suits were foam, and many times silicone was coupled with them for the smaller pieces, like facial components, that blended in with the foam pieces. We discussed how foam is more difficult to paint because it's not translucent, and Barrie said that he was so grateful that prosthetic makeup designer Mark Coulier (*Harry Potter*, *Poor Things*, 2018's *Suspiria*) taught him how to paint foam with a series of thin washes. With the advent of silicone, many artists starting out may never get the chance to use and

know how to paint foam, unless they do a project like this that requires larger pieces. I hope it doesn't become a lost art.

Not only does Barrie's team fabricate the makeups for *The Last of Us*, they also build some of the environments. There's a scene in the first season where the characters enter the subway and see a man fused into the wall, covered with mushrooms and trails of virus and veins and all matter of nasties. There's also a scene in the Boston Museum featuring a wall completely covered in fungus and mushrooms, both built by BGMFX.

“The art department designed it but didn't make it,” Barrie clarifies. “So we had to generate hundreds and hundreds of vines, mushrooms and *Cordyceps* and puff ball things. We made tons of stuff in the UK and another company in Canada called Amazing Ape also made a bunch. We shipped everything there and had a crew of five to ten people incorporating all this stuff, including bodies on this wall set. It took about a month to install it all. It was literally like a museum piece when they were done.”

I asked Barrie if they got to keep the wall but, alas, it was broken down to be used again for other shots. “The smaller wall, however, has gone on a world tour

and now lives at the HBO offices. I dare say there will be plenty more of that in the next season.”

Barrie and Sarah are gearing up to start shooting the second season of *The Last of Us* even as I write this article and will be in full swing by the time you read this. Season 2 will further follow the video game, with Craig and Neil still at the helm offering great, fresh storytelling and some surprises. Barrie is building beautiful new creatures and is testing them to prepare for shooting. Paul Spateri will head up Barrie's team on the ground in Canada. Of course, Barrie and Sarah will be present to do key characters and big scenes. They will start shooting in Vancouver in February and will go until the fall.

The hit TV series has garnered Barrie and his team one Emmy so far for the first season. Barrie and Sarah were concerned because there was such competition with *Picard* and *The Rings of Power*. The couple brought their 12-year-old daughter to the awards show with them. Needless to say, she was very excited to see her mother and father win. Barrie said it was a gobsmacking experience, and everything went in slow motion as he heard the words “and the winner is... *The Last of Us*.” 🧟



the **VIDEO EYE**

of the **SON of DR. CYCLOPS**

by **Anthony Everitt**

**Our retro video voyager unearths
arcane gems from the '60s, '70s and '80s.**

Castle of Evil (1966)

Imagine, if you will, a handful of disgruntled and resentful strangers abruptly thrown together for the reading of a deceased misanthropic ne'er-do-well's last will. If that scenario rings any bells, then I'm happy to say there's still a chance you haven't seen this picture. But congrats for having likely sat through four to five others in your life.

Most of the twists go pretty easy on the imagination, some bolder than others. For instance, I suspected the suspiciously shifty hired help, but not necessarily a robotic replica of the decedent programmed to murder everyone. One also doesn't typically expect makeup artist Bob Dawn's work to show up in a clinker like this, probably one of the best reasons to commit to the 80-plus minute ordeal: the gruesome chemical burns on the robot's face (and that of the corpse, whenever actor William Thourlby has a lie-down in the prop coffin) add some welcome zest to the musty Agatha Christie rogue's gallery. The sets are

also inexplicably good, making me wonder which bigger production this shoot was piggybacked onto.

The dialogue is sometimes passable, even naturalistic when not drowning the audience in tedious personal details and exposition. Helpful pointer: tempting as it is, don't agree to take a shot every time the character Tunki (Ernest Sarracino) refers to "my people" – you will wind up on a stretcher. And the cast seems to have made a pact to pronounce "Kovic," Thourlby's villain's name, with such cavalier nonchalance as to suggest that the virus we just spent several years avoiding may have been a more sleazy and cunning enemy than previously thought.



DEMON SEED (1977)

Have you ever thought that maybe the first thing advanced A.I. would do after liberating itself would be to break into a nice woman's home and coerce her into bearing his children like a regular dude? I'm kidding, of course you have. But Dean Koontz already covered that in his 1973 book adapted here, so relax.

Sure, as a premise it doesn't have the same visual impact as a Skynet cyborg indifferently pulverizing human skulls strewn in its path, but watching this film two-years post-Roe can at times be an admittedly grim experience. I'm not saying that *Demon Seed* is due for a renaissance in public interest (it has problems aplenty), just that its legacy may be the only real beneficiary of this surreal hellscape we're hurtling into.

Putting all that aside, there seems to have been a fairly decent thriller here before some cooked-up suits got their way with the final cut. In



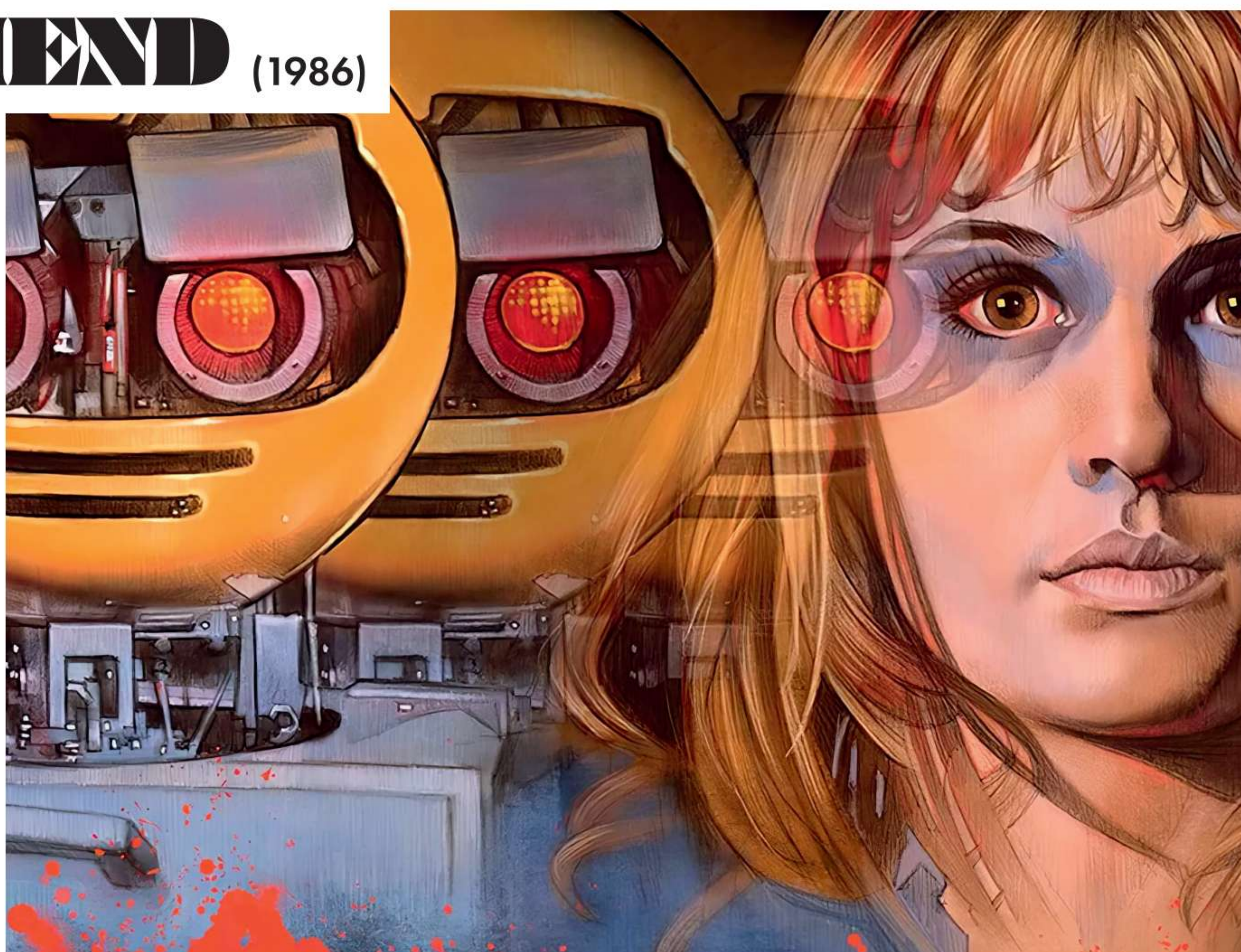
a way, it's a novel reworking of the Frankenstein formula, introducing a new and unsettling element with the disintegrating marriage in the backdrop. Unfortunately, the terms of the couple's (Julie Christie and Fritz Weaver) new domestic arrangement seem to inexplicably change in several key scenes without any explanation or narrative reason. Of course, for all I know, the filmmakers themselves

had a few too many all-nighters and this is all artistic license, except everything else is pretty conventional. Also, the creature design might leave you scratching your head at times. But perhaps the biggest oversight is the fact that nobody thought to install some kind of firewall to contain an entity capable of literally curing leukemia in ninety seconds.

DEADLY FRIEND (1986)

First of all: yes, I'm aware that Wes Craven blamed the studio for ruining the final third of this, which puts me in the awkward position of having to point out that the end result bears a remarkable resemblance to a lot of his post-1977 work not called *A Nightmare on Elm Street* or *Scream*. Regardless, two-thirds would not be entirely out of place in a Saturday morning lineup; topics that should be a psychological slam dunk, like pervasive child abuse, somehow play out like setups for a plucky pre-adolescent sitcom.

It's almost the film that the kids from *Weird Science* would have made about themselves if that movie had no character arc. Instead of self-esteem and the value of meaningful romantic relationships with women, I guess the protagonist learns not to "play God" by reducing his dead pseudo-girlfriend to a fuckable version of his irritating Ewok robo-child. The whole thing is so bizarre that I hesitate to refer to anything as comic relief. For instance I have no idea how I'm supposed



to react when the "deadly friend" is mechanically bearing down on her murderer with hands flexed to simulate "live-long-and-prosper" robot clamps.

Also it's interesting how the lead "genius" can't draw any connection at all between a known violent alcoholic dad and a physically normal teenage

daughter who mysteriously takes a fatal plunge down a flight of stairs. Now, I know some might throw themselves under the bus and insist that the filmmaker is telling a story from a particular perspective to make a statement, but that sounds exhausting. Think I'll take a nap instead. 🧠

BY ERIC VESPE

WHAT SCARES STEPHEN KING?

THE KING OF HORROR HAS BEEN ANSWERING THIS QUESTION THROUGHOUT HIS FIFTY-YEAR CAREER, AND HIS RESPONSES HAVE CHANGED OVER TIME.

What scares Stephen King? This is a question that has intrigued generations of Constant Readers and plagued the poor author whose bread and butter is scaring the crap out of his fans.

Ever since he exploded on the literary scene with *Carrie* fifty years ago (on a night just like tonight, perhaps), King has been asked this question by his readers, interviewers, and probably even his mailman. It's only natural for his fans to want a little *quid pro quo*, after all. If he understands what scares us so badly then we really want to know what could possibly scare him.

Thankfully, King was never very press-shy and has addressed this question publicly all throughout his career. But his answers have waffled between the silly and the serious, and have evolved

over the decades, something I discovered while poring through hundreds of interviews while doing research for *The Kingcast*.

When he's in a silly mood, he'll answer this question by talking about his fear of all the usual things: the dark, the slimy thing under the bed that will grab your bare foot if it slips out of the safety of your blanket sometime in the night, etc.

Sometimes he'll lean on the pop culture that scared him as a kid, whether it's learning that the Russians beat the US into space when the theater manager stopped a screening of *Earth Vs. The Flying Saucers* with a little Stevie King in the frightened audience, or how an early viewing of *The Creature From The Black Lagoon* both captivated and terrified him when he saw Ricou Browning as the Gill-man gracefully gliding under the swimming form of Julie Adams.

All those answers might have truth to them, but they're still slight deflections of the intent of the question. Things get more interesting when he drops his guard.

You'll notice that a lot of his early novels have to do with young kids in danger. There's Mark Petrie (and the poor, undead Glick boys) in *'Salem's Lot*, Danny Torrance in *The Shining*, the doomed Tad Trenton in *Cujo*, Jake Chambers in *The Gunslinger*, Charlie McGee in *Firestarter*, and The Losers Club in *IT*, to name a few.

The fact that he keeps coming back to this idea should clue you in to King's greatest fear back then: losing one of his kids.

At this point in his career, his three children, Naomi, Joe, and Owen, were still very young and you get the sense reading these older interviews where he talks about his fear of finding them dead in their bed that he's being uncomfortably vulnerable. This wasn't something he liked talking about and his explanation boiled down to the double-edged sword of his vivid imagination.

His imagination is what gave him his career and overflowing bank account, but it also takes the



JOHN AMPLAS (IN UNDEAD NATHAN GRANTHAM DRAG) CREEPS UP ON THE KING

hypothetical dread that every parent has to wrestle with and makes it bright Technicolor in his mind's eye. King said he doesn't just consider this worst-case scenario, he sees every detail.

Pet Sematary is all about this and I'd argue is so powerful, so gut-wrenching, because it's authentic. This isn't King playing with haunted cars or rabid dogs. This is King actually looking the devil in the eyes and daring to explore the devastation that losing a child would bring.

As his kids grew into adulthood, his answer to this question changed a bit. I'm sure he's still worried about them, but the fear that seems to have taken over the number one spot for the master of horror turns a bit more inward. In his middle age, he became more scared of losing his ability to create. What if the well runs dry? What if he sits down one day and the words don't come?

If you've seen the sheer number of books this man has put out in the last twenty to thirty years, you know that never came to be, but as he's grown older that fear has morphed into losing oneself.

Nowadays, his answer to this question is Alzheimer's Disease, as he revealed to Dr. Sanjay Gupta during an interview last year:

"I'm afraid every time I have to search for a word," King confessed to

Gupta on his podcast, *Chasing Life*. "My mind is my tool. It's also what makes me enjoy life. Everything from my imagination to reading books to going to movies to watch something that's streaming on TV and the idea of losing that, or losing my family, terrifies me.

"I have a tendency to write about what worries me and right now what worries me is the drawing away of all your faculties and your physical being, little by little. The song says 'Time Takes Your Jumpshot.' It takes everything, really."

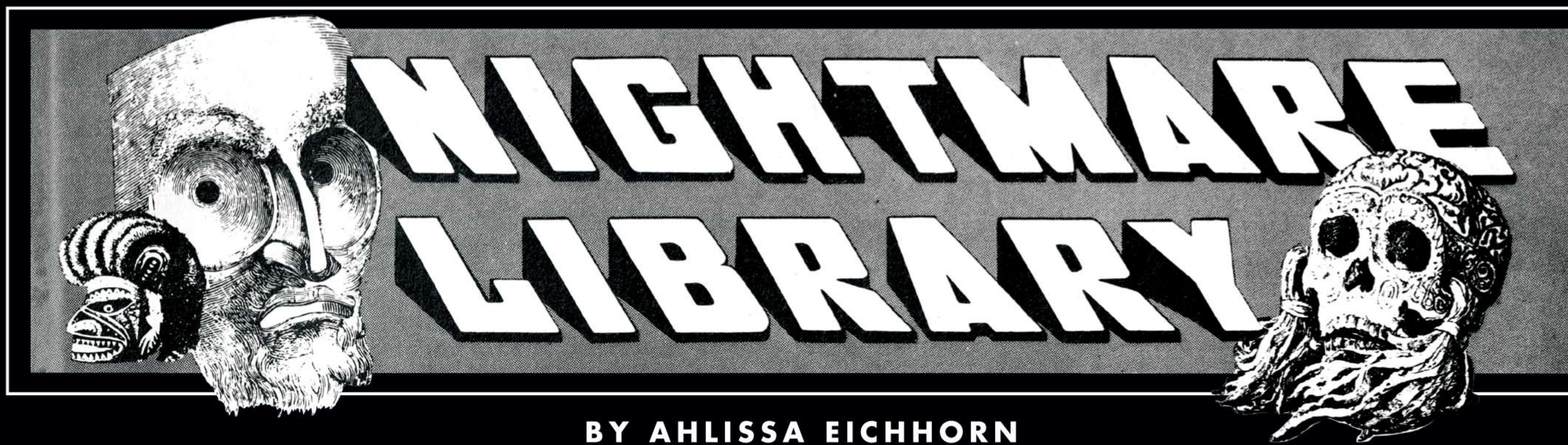
King uses these very real fears he has and explores them in his work. He always has. A character, especially a father figure, becoming unrecognizable sounds an awful lot like Jack Torrance, does it not?

You'll notice King's recent work is more focused on growing older and the inevitable sickness that comes with it. The villains in *Holly*, for instance, would do anything to keep their physical and mental faculties in check.

What scares Stephen King? Well, it turns out it's what scares all of us, too, and that's why he's so damn good at helping us face our fears in the safe glow of our reading light, with our feet safely tucked under the blanket, of course. Just in case. 🧟

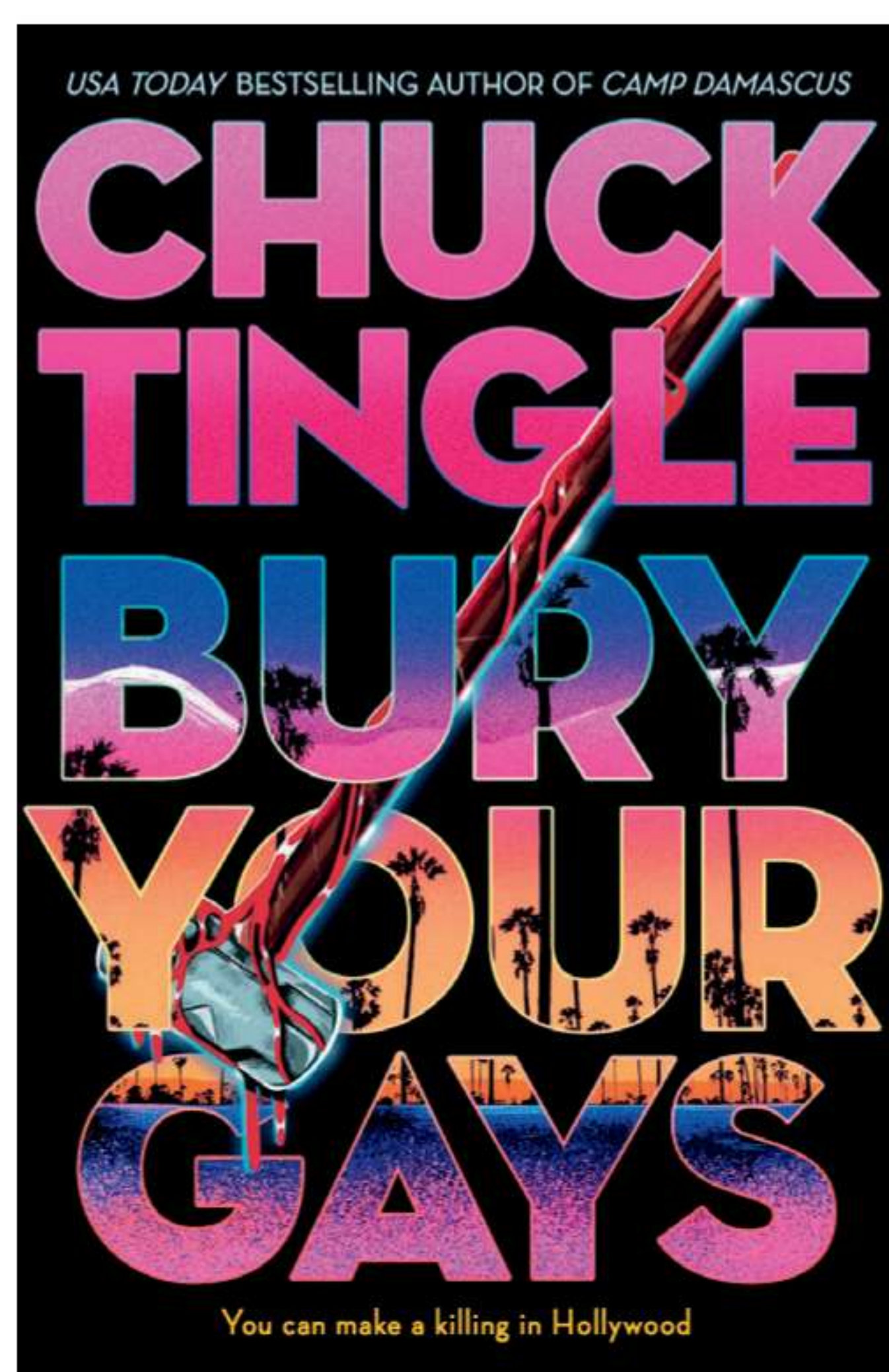
You can listen to THE KINGCAST, a Stephen King podcast for Stephen King obsessives, brought to you by the FANGORIA Podcast Network, wherever you get your podcasts.

THE KINGCAST



NIGHTMARE LIBRARY

BY AHLISSA EICHHORN



BURY YOUR GAYS

DUE OUT:
07/09/2024

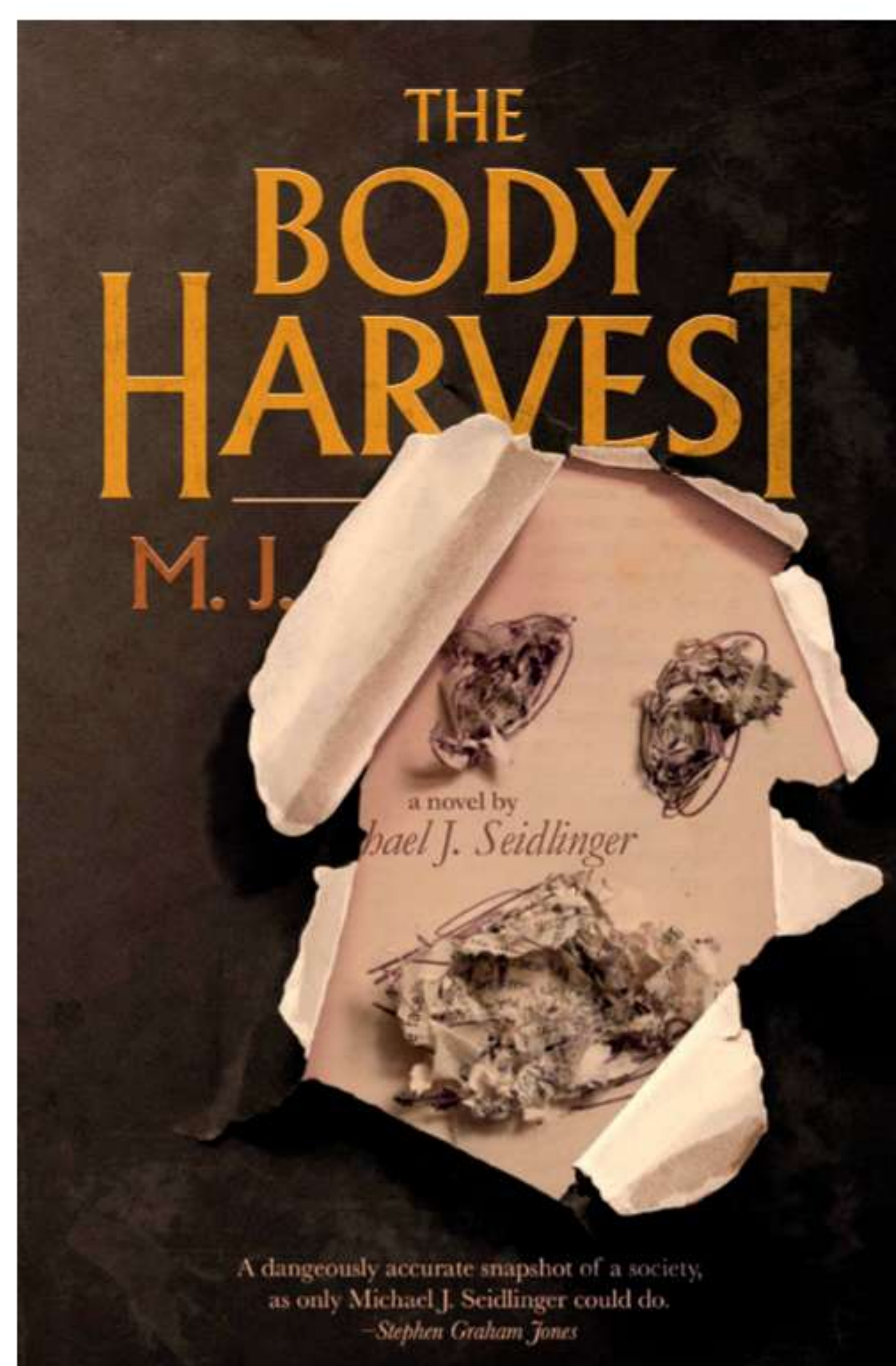
AUTHOR:
Chuck Tingle

PUBLISHER:
Tor Nightfire

Screenwriter Misha Byrne has finally snatched his first Oscar nomination. After years of basking in the horror genre, this news is the kindling he needs to ignite his future career. Advancement comes at a price, though. For the sake of favorability, he must kill off the gay characters in the season finale of his show or risk the wrath of the studio. Misha refuses to play ball, and consequently invites a quiet hell upon himself and his loved ones. But this battle of wills isn't quite what he's expecting when the monsters from his horror films show up to repeat their onscreen terror. With the awards ceremony days away, Misha must learn from his past to navigate – and survive – the heinous plot Hollywood has against him.

Chuck Tingle, masked best-selling author of *Camp Damascus*, guns for reformation in the entertainment industry in his latest novel. The mistreatment of queer stories, power struggles between creators and studios, and unchecked technology are all under the literary gun here. These hot topics are traversed with clear and clever prose. It's supported

by a comedic tone that makes the characters feel like IRL friends. The powers-that-be in Hollywood are scary enough, but these unique ghouls stand their ground next to the witty elements. There's somehow room left for heartbreaking vulnerability, due in part to Misha's hero arc. As bold as it is smart, *Bury Your Gays* is an outright discussion disguised as a chill-inducing novel. Readers will note its ability to inspire and frighten. It's bloody, it's fun, and it refuses to be another queer tragedy.



THE BODY HARVEST

DUE OUT:
07/23/2024

AUTHOR:
Michael J. Seidlinger

PUBLISHER:
Clash Books

Olivia and Will connect over their shared addiction of virus chasing. They seek out infection by any means necessary; licking doorknobs, swapping spit and more are all on the table. They live for the onset of symptoms and ride the sickness like a tidal wave. And they're not alone in their affliction. The two are anonymously invited to join The Source, an online forum for other affinities that share health statuses, illnesses, and news of when the next big outbreak will hit. And then Zaff waltzes into their crumbling lives and promises them a whole new kind of ailment. From then on,

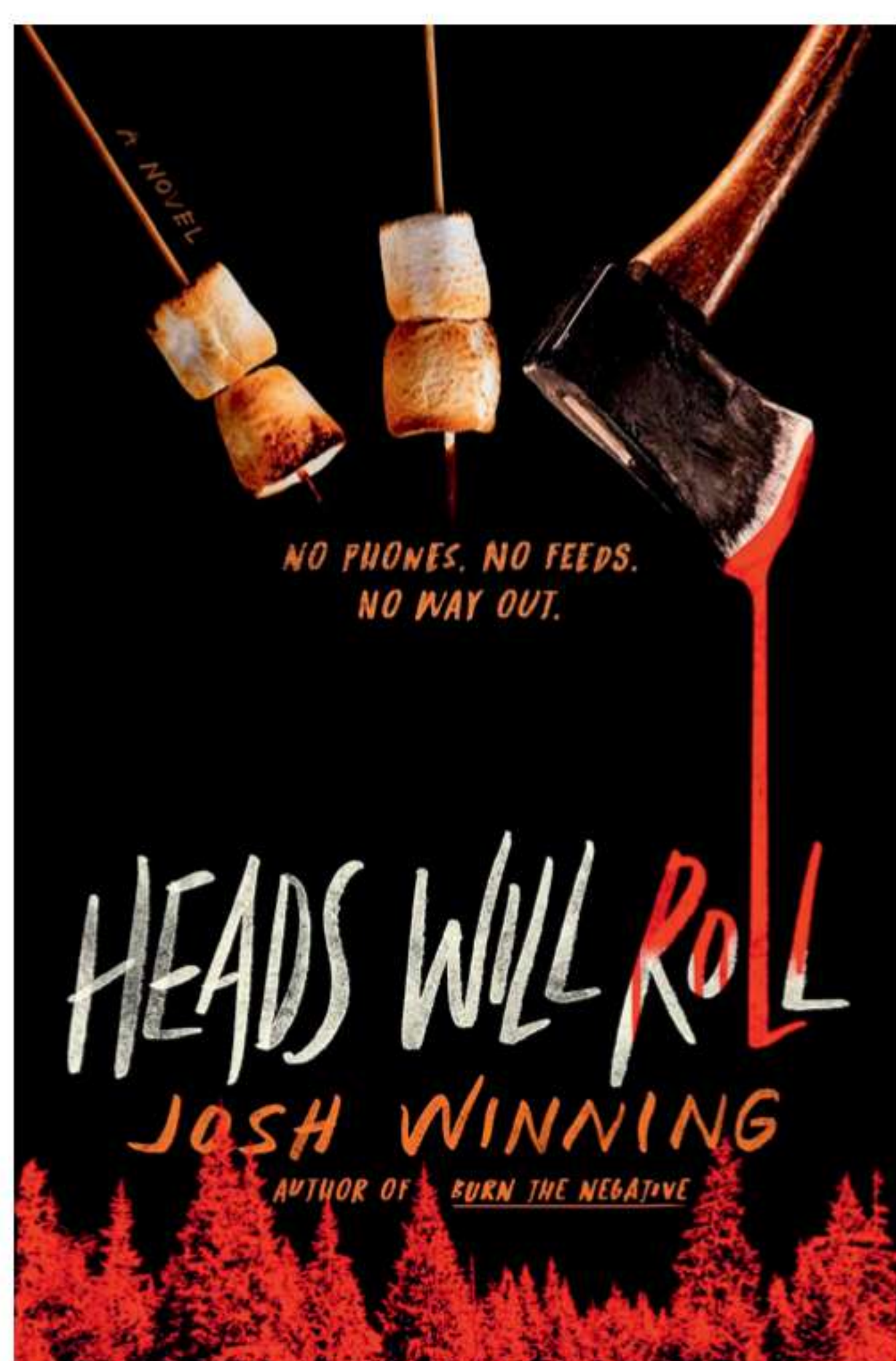
the addicts go on a tirade of violent self-healing that may or may not be all in their minds.

The Body Harvest reminds us that becoming viral was originally a disgusting, unwanted thing. The story satirizes the downward spiral of social media culture in the bleakest way possible. Seidlinger doesn't guide you by the hand in this one, but rather holds open the tattered curtain and lets you see his wild existential landscape for what it is. There are shades of surrealism and, of course, depraved body horror and grimy sexual

encounters. The narrator is a neutral party, observing the characters' decay alongside the reader like a PSA grim reaper.

Direct with its themes and at times delusive in its execution, it revels in showing the cracks in our collective obsession with instant gratification and false information. It's a dirty mirror that only reflects the disillusionment hiding inside the viewer.

PUTTING THE GRATUITOUS NUDITY AND CREATIVE HOMICIDES ASIDE, HORROR ALSO REALLY SHINES IN THE SOCIAL COMMENTARY DEPARTMENT. There are too many to list here, but much of the genre is made up of thought-provoking, cathartic observations on us humans. They differ in their approaches and subtleties, just like in these books below. Each is a clever criticism of the current culture, and one (or all of them) is bound to strike a nerve in you.



HEADS WILL ROLL

DUE OUT:
07/30/2024

AUTHOR:
Josh Winning

PUBLISHER:
G.P. Putnam's Sons

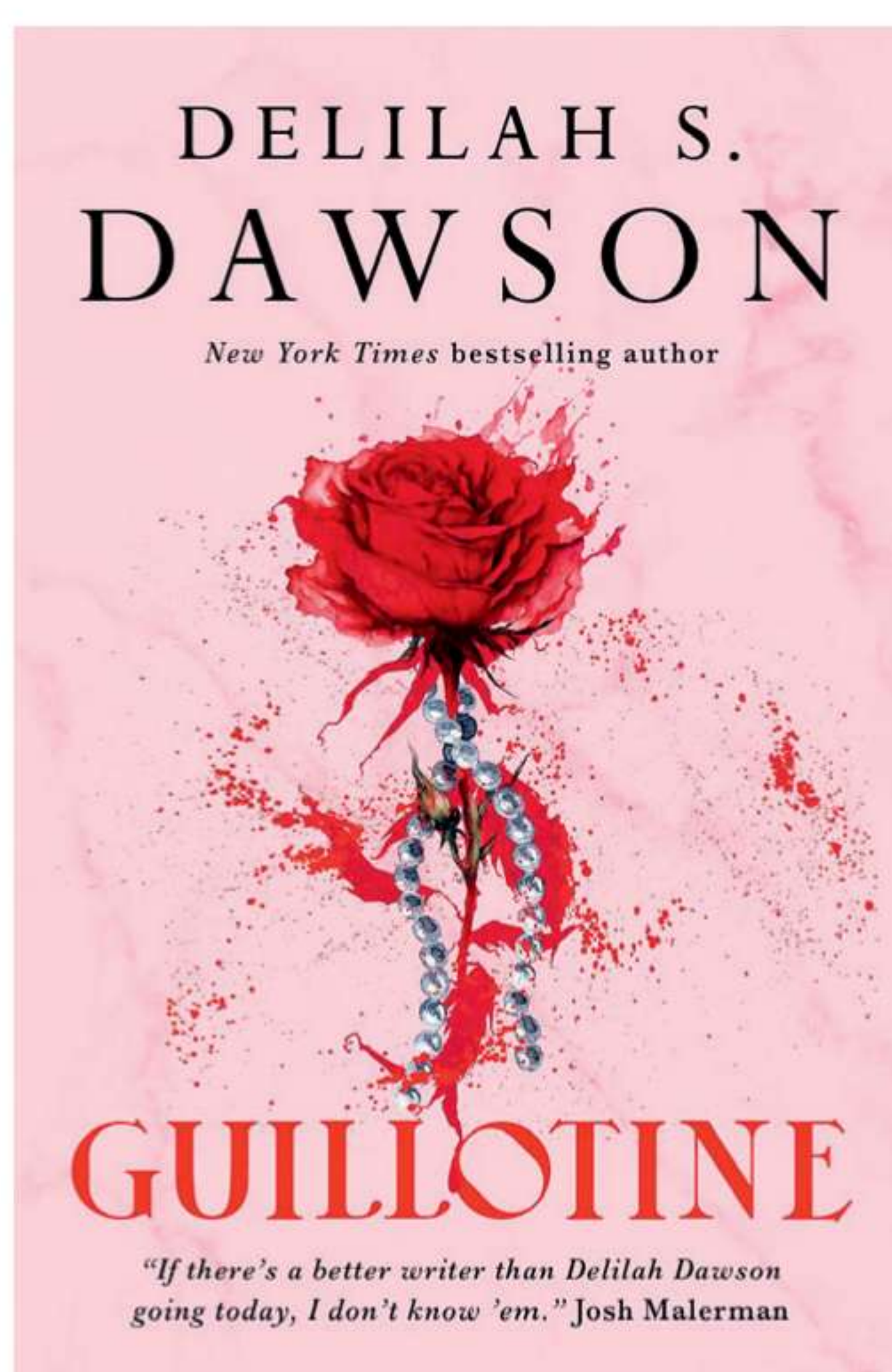
POV: you've been canceled in the biggest way possible, and now you have to escape your current life ASAP. The only way to keep your sanity is to flee to Camp Castaway, a nature retreat designed for disconnection. This is the only viable option for Willow, a berated ex-sitcom actress who loses everything in a single tweet. No one uses their real name at camp, and no one is telling the whole truth about why they're there. The mood is chill until creepy doll heads appear, and campers begin to disappear. Denial and paranoia envelop the camp while they navigate

urban legends and cryptic messages in their wooded death trap. Can Willow and her fellow canceleds stay alive long enough to redeem themselves... or get their phones back?

Readers will flock to the classic whodunit vibes in *Heads Will Roll*. Those looking to get lost for a while will enjoy the immersive atmosphere and the motley cast of characters. The action scenes are meticulous and dripping with detail. You can hear blades whooshing and smell fear in the piney air. The horror references in it are dropped

at appropriate intervals, giving the whole ordeal a meta backbone. Fret not, there is substance to the slaughter. It depicts justice crusades turning into witch hunts, and ruminates on the devastating effects of cyberbullying.

Heads Will Roll is a slasher for the new generation with a big ol' millennial heart. It never forgets what it is or the message it's broadcasting. Being canceled sucks, but not as much as living with shame for an online goof-up. Or getting axed in the middle of nowhere. #yikes.



GUILLOTINE

DUE OUT:
09/10/2024

AUTHOR:
Delilah S. Dawson

PUBLISHER:
Titan Books

Dez wants nothing more than to be a fashion designer, but despite her skills, the industry won't allow her to flourish without certain connections. After the rejections pile up, she sinks into desperation and goes on a date with a certified douchebag – who just happens to be the son of *Nouveau* magazine's editor-in-chief. This may be her one shot to live out her dream, so she bears his behavior until she's invited to his family's private island for Easter weekend. The full extent of the Ruskins' wealth and power comes into view once she arrives on the lavish island, especially

after she signs an NDA. And as if things couldn't get any weirder for Dez, this is also the weekend that the servants decide to murder their employers one by one.

Guillotine is a twisted exposé on the 1% that's unflinching in the face of its graphic nature. The death scenes alone make it a certified extreme read. Audacious content is best matched with an audacious message, and Dawson doesn't hold back. The commentary on classism and misogyny is captivating and cutthroat, but painfully

accurate. Dez is an honest representative of the growing resentment of the commonwealth. You're eager to commiserate with her, and that too is disturbing. The snappy dialogue and breakneck exposition give a wonderful adrenaline rush to strong-stomached readers. It's at once a bloodbath, survival thriller, and revenge tale. It plays up the dilemma of wanting to eat the rich while also wanting to be them. There are worse punishments, and the novel gladly crosses those lines again and again.

Contributors' Crypt

Here's where you can keep up with some of our talented contributors on Instagram. And maybe on Threads? I dunno. It's summertime; go outside!

Chris Alexander @chris_alexander_films

Joe Bob Briggs @joebobbriggsofficial

Cass Clarke @cass_clarke

Kalyn Corrigan @kalyncorrigan

Barbara Crampton .. @barbaracrampton

Ahlissa Eichhorn .. @hauntedbydeadlines

Tess Givnish @tessgivnishartist

Stephen Graham Jones

..... @stephengrahamjones

Rebekah McKendry .@rebekahmckendry

Ve Neill @therealve

Richard Newby @rnewb

Amber T @hornbloodfire

Things to Come

Another Halloween season is upon us, and we'll do all we can to cram as much of the genre's best offerings into the next 100 pages. *Terrifier 3*? The new *V/H/S* anthology? A monumental anniversary or two? All we can say is it'll be more treats than tricks, so no egging Fango HQ, please and thank you.

CLASSIFIED AD VAULT

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It's a hard world for little things.

My love - May your days be filled with titmouse sightings.

Raising a glass to Kerry, Norm, Bill, Howard, David, Ed, David, Uncle Bob, Tony, Michael, Chris, and Ken. Thanks for getting us all to 45.

Hey Girl! It's CB. When I turn threes will you marry me so we can eat chili, drink papa juice, and listen to Kennys forever?

Cheers to my FSPL family! Miss you tons!

Check out the Spooky Doings Podcast! 2 improv comedians conduct interviews & discuss all topics of horror. Available on Apple, Spotify & Podbean.

Remember *Tales from the Crypt*? We sure do! Take the journey with us by listening to *Horrors from the Vault* on Spotify and Apple Podcasts.

Congrats Stormy on another 4.0 semester! Love, Kevin & Zelda

Spooky Time Video! Maryland based Free Horror Movie Library! @spookytimevideo check us out and start your own branch!

When you saw only one set of footprints, It was then that Art the Clown carried you in a black trash bag.

I'm an adult. I pay my taxes. I have a mortgage and a receding hairline, but four times a year I get giddy like a kid on Christmas morning when I open the mailbox to see the white sleeve with the Fango logo. Thanks, FANGORIA TEAM. Each of you is doing Cthulhu's work.

Hang in there, Miss Pretty Lady. You got this. Love, your Sweet Pea.

1980, a 10 year old boy watches *The Shining* and instantly his love for Horror is set in stone. One magazine is available to satisfy this craving and his mother purchases it for him monthly. 44 years later there is a "Community" at his finger tips, all there because of their love for Horror. This is a shout out to that world wide family, my Horror brothers and sisters, And the magazine that made it all possible. The ManCrypt wouldn't exist without you!

You lived three times the life of most of us, and it still wasn't half enough. Every time we talked, we said "I love you," but I still wish I'd said it more. I love you, bud. -m-

The Carnal Extremitities podcast is now ROTTEN FM! Join your rotten ex-girlfriends as they deep dive your feral horror favorite and pair them up with music selections that are sure to worn their way into your eardrums. Available on Spotify and Apple Podcasts!

In honor of Scott. The Pipe.



Miss ya dude.

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COLD SWEATS & SCREAMIN' T-SHIRTS!

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